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The Electoral Influence of Teachers' Unions on Democratic Education Policy Priorities

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Honors Thesis

Oberlin College

April 2015

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Introduction

The coalition political party that is the Democratic Party has been closely allied with the labor movement since the 1930s passage of New Deal legislation, and since then unions have been an important power base in Democrats' ability to win elections. Recent political shifts have implications for the relationship between Democrats and the labor movement, and ultimately for what policies the Democratic party champions. With this thesis, I will focus on a more narrow segment of the labor movement: the teachers' unions. Within the labor movement, teachers' unions represent a strong political force, and have more money and members than any other sector. In the 2014 federal election cycle, the National Education Association spent \$23 million while the next highest union spender spent just under \$10 million. Beyond their tremendous financial resources, another point of note about teachers' unions is that their policy interest, education policy, is one of the most divisive areas for the Democratic Party.

Disagreement about education policy currently represents one of the most pronounced divides in the Democratic Party. At its most basic level, on one side of the issue are the nation's powerful teachers' unions, and on the other are wealthy, entrepreneurial-minded Democrats who are corralling parents and pushing an education reform movement. Teachers' unions are among the most powerful political organizations in the United States, and their support has been significant in the election of various politicians around the country. The question remains, however, whether teachers' unions have the ability to determine education policy outcomes through their support of, or opposition to, certain Democratic candidates. An answer to that question will give insight into whether teachers' unions should attempt to influence education policy outcomes – even at the expense of broad labor interests – during the electoral process.

To test that question, in this thesis I will examine teachers' unions' choices to endorse political candidates in Democratic primaries. I will argue that teachers' unions, as a distinct segment of the labor movement, are powerful enough that they are able to choose between Democrats based on their education policy positions, rather than having to follow along with the larger labor movement and make endorsement decisions based on candidates' positions on general labor policy. Although teachers' unions act with the ultimate goal of promoting their members' interests as employees, the distinction between acting with a primary interest in education policy instead of a primary interest in labor policy is an important one. The reason that this distinction is significant is that often, when teachers' unions endorse based on education policy, they are breaking away from other unions to do so. At the moment, there is one such split within the labor movement, between public sector and private sector unions, which is seen in its most extreme when a Wisconsin engineers' union endorsed the vehemently anti-labor governor, Scott Walker, for his re-election campaign in 2014. Although Walker successfully pushed anti-collective bargaining laws through the state legislature in 2011, some private sector unions were able to rationalize and forgive the governor because his focus was limited to public sector unions.

Such splits weaken the labor movement. When teachers' unions endorse based on education policy, they are not only distinguishing and separating themselves from private sector unions, but also from other public sector unions. This limits their power, and the power of other unions. But teachers' unions have enough power and influence by themselves that they seem to be comfortable taking that risk in order to influence education policy. The blame for this split does not lay solely with the teachers' unions. By pursuing education reform, Democrats have given their labor base cause for worry, and caused sectors to divide in pursuit of their own interests.

My thesis is grounded in the historical relationship between Democrats and the labor movement in the United States, and in the development and politicization of teachers' unions in the second half of the 20th century. I test my thesis with two case studies of Democratic gubernatorial primaries that are clear examples of competitive elections where education policy played a role: the 2014 elections in New York and Rhode Island. I have found that teachers' unions are capable of swaying policy positions at the electoral margins—that they may exert a decisive influence in a tight race in which two candidates have markedly different perspectives on education policy. Overall, however, teachers' unions are neither capable of setting a campaign's political agenda nor of setting the terms of discussions surrounding education policy. What they succeed in doing effectively using their electoral power to elevate the candidate of their choosing—however, it is difficult to predict how the winning candidate will respond to their education policy priorities.

Theoretical Context

There is a massive literature about labor unions and Democrats in America, including literature that focuses on one or the other and works that discuss the relationship between the two groups and how their dynamics have changed over the years. For the purposes of this thesis, I focused on newer texts, those published during the last twenty years. While even that limited selection covers a great many different components of the topics, it is difficult to find authors who have examined the confluence of teachers' unions, Democrats, and education policy within the context of electoral politics.

Many scholars in the past twenty years have focused on discussions about why unions matter and speculations on their place in American politics in the future. In *Why Unions Matter*,

written in 1998, Michael Yates gives an overview of unions' importance in the context of local, national and global politics. He argues that the labor movement is still relevant and that to remain so it must be proactive with regards to newer movements including the push for racial and gender diversity. Nelson Lichtenstein offers another overview of labor in the United States in his 2003 *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*, a text that is more detailed than Yates' book. Lichtenstein recognizes the changes that have taken place in the historic relationship between Democrats and the labor movement, and insists that in spite of the way that labor has become weaker in American politics, the labor movement can still play a crucial role in the United States. *State of the Union* argues that unions are a democratizing force, and that by focusing on that role, labor unions can be centrally important in the United States.

Among the many scholars who examine the relationship between labor and political parties are James Piazza and Peter Francia, who both look closely at current and likely forthcoming changes in the relationship. Piazza takes a global view in his 2001 paper *Delinking Labor: Labor Unions and Social Democratic Parties under Globalization*, and argues that political parties like the American Democratic Party have moved away from the labor movement as a result of globalization. This view contradicts the perception that Democrats were reacting to a conservative shift within the United States during the Regan Revolution by shifting away from labor and more towards center policies. In his 2006 book *The Future of Organized Labor in American Politics*, Peter Francia begins from the premise that labor unions and Democrats' goals have become misaligned. Francia focuses on the AF-CIO under John Sweeney, and considers how labor unions became more willing during that time (Sweeney was president from 1995 to 2009) to challenge Democrats who vote against labor's interests. These two texts offer some of the most relevant context for my thesis, and provide reasons for both Democrats and labor unions

to focus on more narrow interests in addition to, or even apart from, their broader labor goals. In a political climate where the Democratic Party faces pressure to diverge from labor priorities, and when interest groups are increasingly important, the way the labor unions act within a policy area such as education policy is significant for the future of the larger movement and its place in American politics.

In order to examine the specific relationship between teachers' unions and Democrats, I have focused primarily on a few books, and recognize that these authors do not represent a comprehensive survey of the literature that exists about the modern Democratic Party or the politics of teachers' unions.

Authors who provide historical analysis of the Democratic Party from its formation up through the present day frequently include or touch on the relationship between Democrats and the labor movement. Jay Cost analyzes the Democratic Party in his book *Spoiled Rotten*, and argues that the Democratic Party has lost its way by focusing too much energy on election and re-election instead of dedicating enough time and effort to governing. Cost writes about the importance of the labor movement to the Democrats, and how their relationship has shifted over time with the proliferation of interest groups such as environmental groups in the later part of the 20th century. Another author, Al From, writes about the formation of the modern "New Democrats" and the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) in his book *The New Democrats and the Return to Power*. From, who founded the DLC, argues that the rise of centrist politics in the Democratic Party saved the Party from obsolescence, and is very dismissive of the relationship with labor. These books tend to dismiss or ignore the question of whether the Democratic Party owes the labor movement anything for their assistance in campaigns and elections.

There are also authors who focus on teachers' unions and their role in politics. Myron Lieberman wrote his book *The Teacher Union* in 1997, and he presents a very strong critique of teachers' unions' political activities. His critiques resonate because Lieberman himself is a former member and leader within the American Federation of Teachers. He argues that their lobbying and efforts in electoral politics are short-sighted, designed only to benefit the unions and their members, and in fact have a detrimental impact on public education in America. Terry Moe, a professor at Stanford and senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, has written a related book that argues that powerful teachers' unions are inhibiting the improvement of American public schools. Moe ends his book, *Special Interest*, by predicting the demise of teachers' unions' political power. On the other side of the debate, education historian Diane Ravitch has written several books, including *Reign of Error*, which argue that the education reform movement is a privatization movement that threatens the American public schools, and that the negative attention focused on teachers and teachers' unions is misplaced.

Overall, there is a shortage of academic writing about the relationship between the teachers' unions specifically and the Democratic Party. There has also been limited attention given to cases of teacher union involvement in individual electoral campaigns. There are few texts that examine the relationship between teachers' unions' support for specific candidates and education policy outcomes, and no comprehensive texts to examine the implications of such circumstances for the Democratic Party as a whole, or for the Party's education platform.

News coverage today is often the best source of information about individual candidates and the circumstances of their campaigns, including the involvement of teachers' unions. However, news articles typically limit their discussion of teachers' unions' participation to the

endorsement decisions or to a passing reference to union members helping with get-out-the-vote campaign activities.

I have not been able to find analysis of the relationship between teachers' unions and education reform candidates, or the electoral implication of the way that they interact or fail to interact. Finally, although there is literature that discusses the historic electoral interactions between Democrats and labor unions, I have been unable to find any forward-looking analysis of how specific electoral interactions between teachers unions and Democrats may influence the the Democratic Party and its education policies, or to the larger relationship between the Democrats and the unions.

Chapter 1: Brief history of the labor movement

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the labor movement in the United States, and of labor's relationship with the Democratic Party. Although this chapter has almost no mention of teachers' unions, this history gives important background information that will leave the reader with a better understanding of the political dynamics that were in place when teachers' unions formed and became political in the 1960s. The loyalty of the labor movement as a whole to the Democratic Party since the 1930s is a tie that teachers' unions adopted and have broadly maintained. But the political calculations that labor unions made in the early years of their political power are similar to those the teachers' unions make today in their electoral activity when choosing between Democratic candidates, and this history should enhance the reader's understanding of the case study chapter. This chapter focuses on the time period beginning around the 1980s when the relationship between Democrats and the labor began to fray, and ends by bringing the reader up to date through Barack Obama's 2008 campaign and his early presidency. This provides a gauge of the national climate that teachers' unions have had to take into account in recent years as they make their political decisions.

The labor movement has historically been allied with the Democratic Party since 1935 when a Democratic Congress and Democratic President passed and signed into law the National Labor Relations Act. More recently, there have been centrist elements of the Democratic Party that have disregarded the historical ties between Democrats and labor. Those elements emerged en masse in the 1980s in response to severe Democratic electoral losses. The 2008 presidential election in some ways brought unions and Democrats closer together again, with public sector unions in particular playing an important role in the successful Obama campaign. Since then, the hope that the labor movement felt with Obama's campaign has declined as he has failed to use

his political power to protect and promote labor interests in regards to free trade policies and collective bargaining rights around the United States.

Democrats and Pro-Labor Legislation

In 1933, the National Industrial Recovery Act was passed as the cornerstone of Roosevelt's New Deal legislation. Section 7(a) of the act provided protection for workers' rights to unionize and engage in collective bargaining, but it failed to clarify what was legal or illegal behavior, and a wave of strikes demonstrated the weaknesses of the law. In 1935, the law was held unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court.

In 1935, the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) was proposed by Senator Robert Wagner, passed by both Democratic houses of Congress, and signed into law by Roosevelt. The Wagner Act formally recognized and protected the rights of unions to exist, to collectively bargain, and to take collective action. The law also established the three-member National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which made the law enforceable, especially after the Act was upheld as constitutional by the Supreme Court in February 1937.

By proposing, passing and signing the National Labor Relations Act into law, Democrats created a strong political tie with the labor movement. Prior to Roosevelt's New Deal legislation, unions in the United States had been non-partisan entities with a two part focus: organizing workers and improving conditions in individual workplaces, and securing broad legal recognition of the right to exist and organize. Major political activation of the labor unions came in 1947 in reaction to passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, which was formally called the Labor-Management Relations Act. This act amended the NLRA, and was written to monitor the activities and power

of labor unions.¹ The most controversial piece of the legislation is section 14(b), which gave states the right to outlaw union-only shops and paved the way for so-called “right-to-work” laws that quickly gained traction in most of the southern states – that year, ten states enacted such statutes.² The Act was passed into law by the Republican House and Senate over Democratic President Truman’s veto. Unions organized to demand repeal of section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act, arguing that workers in a workplace with a union are represented by the union whether or not they pay dues, and if a non-member employee is fired illegally, then the union “must use its time and money to defend him or her, even if that requires going through a costly, time-consuming legal process.” For that reason, unions maintain that Right to Work laws are unfair to dues-paying union members.³

Union Political Activity

Today’s largest union federation is the AFL-CIO, which grew out of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and later merged with the Congress of International Organizations (CIO) in 1955. In 1942, then-president Philip Murray established a political action committee for the CIO. In 1947, the AFL voted to establish Labor’s League for Political Education as a nationwide political action group. When running for reelection in 1948, Truman pledged to eliminate the Taft-Hartley Act, and upon winning in November, he declared that the repeal would be among the first measures he would seek to push through the Democratic controlled

¹ “1947 Taft-Hartley Substantive Provisions,” National Labor Relations Board, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.nlrb.gov/who-we-are/our-history/1947-taft-hartley-substantive-provisions>.

² “Right-to-Work Resources,” National Conference of State Legislatures, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/right-to-work-laws-and-bills.aspx#chart>.
Note: Florida had enacted a statute in 1943

³ “‘Right to Work’ Laws: Get the Facts,” Minnesota AFL-CIO, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.mnafcio.org/news/right-work-laws-get-facts>.

Congress in January 1949.⁴ The CIO endorsed Truman in 1948, while the AFL made no endorsement. In the next cycle, in 1952, both the AFL and the CIO endorsed Democrat Adlai Stevenson for President.

After the CIO split off from the AFL in 1937, the two organizations clashed repeatedly, but the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act seemed to draw the two together. By coincidence, in 1952 the two leaders of the AFL and the CIO died twelve days apart, and the two new union leaders supported a merger.⁵ The CIO in particular faced declining membership and influence in the postwar economy, and Meany and Reuther recognized that for labor to be successful in political advocacy and otherwise, they would have to “work within existing structures like the Democratic party,” and to do so together.⁶ That decision to jointly ally with the Democratic Party marked an important moment because the CIO had considered joining the more conservative Republican Party. The decision to remain allies with the Democrats continued and strengthened the political connection between labor and Democrats. Following their merger in 1955, the new AFL-CIO formed the Committee on Political Education (COPE), which became its political action committee.⁷

In spite of the unions’ cooperation, over the next decades pro-labor reforms failed, and as of 2015, the last major revision to the NLRA was the Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959, which further weakened labor unions. That Act was passed through a Congress with a Democratic majority. However, Democratic control over the legislative process was limited by Southern Democrats who chose to prioritize their identity as members of a conservative coalition over

⁴ Robert Young, “Truman Set to Ask Taft Law Repeal,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 8, 1948, accessed November 29, 2014, <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1948/11/08/page/1/article/truman-set-to-ask-taft-law-repeal>.

⁵ William Green was president of the AFL and Philip Murray was president of the CIO. They were succeeded by George Meany (AFL) and Walter Reuther (CIO).

⁶ Jay Cost, *Spoiled Rotten*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 142.

⁷ Jonathan Cottin and Charles Culhane, “Committee on Political Education,” in *Political Brokers: People, Organizations, Money, Power*, ed. Judith G. Smith, (New York: Liveright, 1972), 92.

traditional Democratic alliances with labor.⁸ Labor leaders continued to push for repeal of Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act, but even with Democratic President Lyndon Johnson as an ally, the law was not repealed. To this day, it remains law.

Public Sector Unions

In 1962, Democratic President Kennedy issued an executive order that gave federal workers a limited right to unionize, further cementing the connection between the Democrats and the labor movement, and laying the groundwork for the sector of the labor movement that has grown most rapidly in size and influence in recent years.⁹ By 1993, government workers made up 47 percent of union membership in the United States, and by 2009, they had grown to a majority of union members.¹⁰ The inclusion of public sector workers in unions complicates the goals and messaging for large unions and for the labor movement as a whole. In the 1950s and 1960s, the AFL-CIO had been operating with the goal of maximizing the share that private workers received from the private sector. Because government workers' pay comes from the government, public sector unions are perceived as wanting to socialize private income by taxing private citizens and redistributing the wealth through increases to public employee wages and benefits. Organized labor in the public sector has been very controversial over the years, and remains so today.

Democrats

Since President Roosevelt's New Deal activism, Democratic Party leaders have been allies of the labor movement, and have considered that support an important part of the

⁸ Cost, *Spoiled Rotten*, 148.

⁹ Cost, *Spoiled Rotten*, 150.

¹⁰ Cost, *Spoiled Rotten*, 151.

Democratic platform. From a utilitarian perspective, the relationship between Democrats and labor is boosted by, or, some would say, is contingent on the assistance that organized labor contributes to the Democratic Party's electoral abilities. Democrats have relied on unions for campaign funding, and for voter outreach efforts during and in between election seasons. An examination of the attitudes of Democratic power brokers during stressful periods when Democrats were losing more elections throws into question the closeness of ties between Democrats and labor, and the extent to which Democrats value their alliance with the labor movement.

Beginning in the 1960s, even as unions acquired new political power with public sector unionization, there was a shift to "New Politics," where liberalism focused more on civil rights and middle class concerns, and turned away from the working class.¹¹ Issue-politics came to the forefront of political organizing, with the three central interests being feminism, environmentalism, and consumer rights.¹² Political power came from a sophisticated lobbying outfit, rather than blocs of voters, and the traditional bases of party power lost influence. Those formerly powerful segments were machine bosses, the conservative South, and traditional unions in the AFL-CIO.¹³

In the 1980s, influential figures in the Democratic Party became worried about their Party's ability to win elections. After Ronald Reagan's sweeping victory in 1984, in which the House and Senate also kept their Republican majorities, a group gathered to consider a new strategy for Democrats. Al From, an important behind-the-scenes figure in Democratic politics, was executive director of the House Democratic Caucus when he produced a report in 1982 called "Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity: A Democratic Direction for the 1980s." From was a

¹¹ Cost, *Spoiled Rotten*, 181.

¹² Cost, *Spoiled Rotten*, 182.

¹³ Cost, *Spoiled Rotten*, 191.

centrist Democrat who examined the recent electoral losses and decided that the Democrats needed a compelling message about economic growth, with the centerpiece of his report being private sector growth. The report included a call for expanded trade, more cooperative and less confrontational relations between business and labor, and policies that would help Americans manage the transition from a manufacturing economy to a new tech-driven economy.¹⁴ When someone working in the Carter White House asked From how he had gotten labor to sign off on this report for the new strategy for the Democratic Party, From replied, “It was easy. We didn’t ask them.”¹⁵

Out of his strategizing, From founded the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC). His motivation came from the fact that 1984 was the fourth loss for Democrats in the previous five presidential elections, and that fewer Americans were identifying with Democrats than with Republicans, according to polls.¹⁶ He concluded that the Democrats could not win national elections with a coalition of liberals and minorities, and instead needed to “do well among men, whites, independents, and young voters,” with a “coalition built around ideas, not constituency groups.” Fundamentally, From believed that the Democratic Party could not afford to “become a liberal party,” and that instead the message needed to “attract moderates and conservatives, as well.”¹⁷ From wanted to “rid the party of the cancer of single interest and single constituency caucuses,” a category in which he certainly included labor groups. From’s ideas took hold, and many prominent Democrats joined the DLC, including John Kerry, John Edwards, Joe Lieberman, and Al Gore. Bill Clinton became the chairman of the DLC in 1990. When Clinton

¹⁴ Al From, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 38.

¹⁵ From, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power*, 39

¹⁶ From, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power*, 49

¹⁷ From, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power*, 50

won the presidency in 1992, it was an indication that the DLC's Third Way politics were gaining popularity.

Although he was a Democrat, President Bill Clinton supported and promoted the legislation that American labor unions have most resisted since the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947: the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was signed in 1994 and which guaranteed free trade between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Unions feared the effect for American workers, and today the AFL-CIO cites data from the Economic Policy Institute that says over half a million jobs have been lost or displaced since NAFTA took effect in 1994.¹⁸ To this day, the AFL-CIO remains vehemently opposed to NAFTA, and AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said in March, 2014 that “we cannot enact new trade agreements modeled on NAFTA. No other country... uses these deals to get rid of good jobs.”¹⁹ Yet Clinton, whose support for such legislation was no secret, was endorsed by the AFL-CIO in 1992.²⁰ In 1993, the Los Angeles times columnist Harry Bernstein said that although at the time labor made up a much smaller percentage of the private-sector workforce at 11 percent than it had in 1950s (when it reached 35 percent), labor's electoral power was significant, and predicted that Clinton would suffer in his reelection campaign without enthusiastic labor support following NAFTA.²¹ However, when the election came around, the AFL-CIO endorsed Clinton on March 25th, representing the earliest that the AFL-CIO had endorsed a presidential candidate. Polling at the time found that in spite of

¹⁸ “NAFTA,” AFL-CIO, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.aflcio.org/Issues/Trade/NAFTA>.

¹⁹ Annie Lowrey, “Nafta Still Bedevils Unions,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/27/nafta-still-bedevils-unions/?_r=0.

²⁰ Frank Swoboda, “AFL-CIO Leaders Decide It's Time to Endorse Clinton Presidential Bid,” *The Washington Post*, April 14, 1992.

²¹ Harry Bernstein, “Post NAFTA, Don't Discount Union Strength: Clinton may get labor's endorsement in 1996, but that doesn't mean he'll have members' enthusiasm or votes,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 1993, accessed March 20, 2015, http://articles.latimes.com/1993-11-21/opinion/op-59387_1_union-members.

NAFTA, 67 percent of AFL-CIO members planned to vote for Clinton, and only 22 percent supported his Republican opponent.²²

President Clinton's centrism alienated progressive Democrats who supported labor, and after Republicans won back the presidency in 2000, progressives re-emerged for the 2004 election. Howard Dean introduced his candidacy for President as representing "the Democratic Wing of the Democratic Party."²³ Dean energized progressive Democrats in large part through an anti-war message, but he also reached out to traditional segments of the Democratic party that had felt alienated by centrist and DLC Democrats. Dean's 50-state campaign strategy that emphasized grassroots campaigning appealed to labor. In a speech to labor activists, Dean alluded to the tensions within the Democratic Party, saying that "sometimes the Democrats around the country are madder at the Democratic Party in Washington than they are at the Republicans." Dean continued to say that Democrats needed to focus on the base of the party, whom he defined as "women, African-Americans, Latinos and the labor movement." SEIU President Andrew Stern referred to establishment Democrats being opposed to Dean's candidacy, and told reporters that "for too long party officials... had taken unions, African-Americans, and other minorities for granted."²⁴

John Kerry, who became the Democratic nominee in 2004 instead of Howard Dean, picked up on the messaging that Dean had begun, and rhetorically modified some of his prior policy positions to appeal to progressives and to unions. Kerry was endorsed by the AFL-CIO despite having voted for NAFTA in 1993 by insisting that he would ensure "workers' rights" in

²² "AFL-CIO Moves Quickly to Endorse Clinton," *CNN All Politics*, March 25, 1996, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://cgi.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1996/news/9603/25/labor/>.

²³ Matt Bai, *The Argument: Billionaires, Bloggers and the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), xiii.

²⁴ Tom Curry, "Unions push Dean closer to triumph," *NBC News*, November 12, 2003, accessed March 20, 2015, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/3475121/ns/politics-tom_curry/t/unions-pushdean-closeto-triumph/#.VHuP1zHF-Sp.

future trade agreements.²⁵ The endorsement came in February of 2004, after most of the candidates had dropped to second tier, but before Kerry was the clear frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. That timing indicates that the AFL-CIO made a real choice of Kerry over John Edwards, who had been pushing trade and workers' rights as one of his key campaign issues.²⁶

Barack Obama and Labor

The 2008 presidential election in some ways brought unions and Democrats closer together again. Public sector unions in particular played an important role in the successful Obama campaign, both financially and in terms of field outreach to voters. Since then, the hope that the labor movement felt with Obama's campaign declined as he failed to use his political power to protect and promote labor interests in regards to free trade policies and collective bargaining rights around the United States.

In the 2008 election cycle, unions hoped to raise \$300 million for Obama and other Democratic candidates.²⁷ It is difficult to get a true number for the amount of money that was spent in support of Obama's campaign because there are different ways to spend money, including direct donations to the campaign, direct donations to Political Action Committees (PACs), or other means such as for voter education of members. The Center for Responsive Politics indicates that labor unions as a sector contributed only \$710,481 to Obama in 2008, a

²⁵ Joel Roberts, "Kerry's Top Ten Flip-Flops," *CBS News*, September 29, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/kerrys-top-ten-flip-flops/>.

²⁶ David M. Halbfinger and Rick Lyman, "The 2004 Campaign: The Challengers; AFL-CIO, Calling for Unity, Gives Backing to Kerry," *The New York Times*, February 20, 2004, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/20/us/2004-campaign-challengers-afl-cio-calling-for-unity-gives-backing-kerry.html>.

²⁷ Angie Drobnic Holan, "The RNC said unions raised \$400 million for Obama in 2008," *PolitiFact*, March 15, 2011, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2011/mar/15/republican-national-committee-republican/rnc-said-unions-raised-400-million-obama-2008/>.

number that is unrealistically small.²⁸ A Wall Street Journal article from 2012 says that Federal Election Commission (FEC) filings include only direct contributions, and that those data do not account for money used for less direct political activity, such as on voter persuasion among union members.²⁹ The Wall Street Journal relied on reports from the Labor Department that gave far more detail about union spending on politics and lobbying. Activities that were reported to the Labor Department but not to the FEC included polling fees, voter education for members, and smaller expenses such as for food provided to union members at political protests in Wisconsin in 2011. These expenditures are not required to be disclosed to the FEC, and so while unions remained well within the rules of election law, the total contributions evident in FEC reports are deceptively small, according to the article.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) provides an example of Obama's relationship with public sector unions during his 2008 election. The union reported spending \$60 million to help elect Obama, with much of that money spent on deploying 3,000 members who worked on the election full time. After winning the election, Obama placed several people with SEIU connections in powerful positions within his administration, including White House political director, a member of Obama's economic recovery board, and a member of the six-member FEC.³⁰ This apparent causal relationship between SEIU political support and those appointments seems to indicate a commitment to the labor movement, and specifically the public sector labor movement. However, because the SEIU has such a strong connection to healthcare, the argument can be made that the appointments were more directly about Obama's healthcare

²⁸ "Top Industries," Barack Obama on OpenSecrets.Org, accessed on March 20, 2015, <http://www.opensecrets.org/pres08/indus.php?cycle=2008&cid=N00009638>.

²⁹ Tom McGinty and Brody Mullins, "Political Spending by Unions Far Exceeds Direct Donations," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 10, 2012, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304782404577488584031850026>.

³⁰ Peter Nicholas, "Obama's curiously close labor friendship," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 2009, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jun/28/nation/na-stern28>.

initiatives and not in fact related to labor's policy priorities. This argument can be bolstered by noting the lack of similar appointments of people with ties to other labor unions. If this is true, that Obama's relationship with the labor movement is more driven by specific policy areas that different unions prioritize than by priorities of the labor movement as a whole, then there are important implications for the teachers' unions. If the Obama administration is defining its relationship with specific unions according to policy areas that they specialize in, and if the Democratic Party by extension does the same, then it makes sense for teachers' unions to make political decisions based on their education policy priorities instead of their labor policy priorities.

Labor's major legislative fight in the past decade was centered around the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), the purpose of which was "to amend the National Labor Relations Act to establish an efficient system to enable employees to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to provide for mandatory injunctions for unfair labor practices during organizing efforts, and for other purposes."³¹ The bill was introduced in the 110th and 11th Congresses in 2007 and 2009 respectively, and although it moved through various stages of lawmaking in 2007, it ultimately failed each time. The bill failed in the 111th Congress even after pro-labor Democrats softened the bill for moderates. Pro-labor Democrats caved to pressure from more moderate Democrats in 2009 and dropped the central "card-check" provision that "would have required employers to recognize a union as soon as a majority of workers signed cards saying that they wanted a union," and would have made it easier for unions to form.³²

³¹ U.S. Congress. Senate. *Employee Free Choice Act*. SR 560. 111th Congress. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d111:SN00560:@@L&summ2=m&>.

³² Steven Greenhouse, "Democrats Drop Key Part of Bill to Assist Unions," *The New York Times*, July 16, 2009, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/17/business/17union.html>.

President Obama publicly supported the bill. As a Senator, Obama was an original co-sponsor of EFCA when it was first introduced in the 110th Congress.³³ As a presidential candidate, Obama promised to sign EFCA into law.³⁴ He continued to express support for the bill all through the 111th Congress, even as the bill languished and it became clear that it would not pass into law.³⁵ Republicans gained control of the House of Representatives after the 2010 election, and as of 2015, EFCA has not been reintroduced.

Analysis

Although labor unions have continued to be powerful allies in Democrats' electoral campaigns, the Democrats have not responded in kind in labor's legislative fights. The Democratic Party, and the Obama administration in particular, appear to be narrowly supporting labor causes when they align perfectly with Democratic initiatives instead of working with labor from the beginning to plan a legislative agenda. The failure of EFCA makes the legislative alliance that the labor movement and the Democrats enjoyed in the first part of the 20th century seem like an anomaly. Pro-labor Democrats' willingness to concede the most controversial aspects of EFCA indicates a divide within the Democratic Party reminiscent of the divide that allowed the Landrum Griffin Act to pass into law in 1959. In 1959, Southern Democrats prioritized their conservative values over their Party allegiance, and in 2007 and 2009, moderate Democrats did the same, refusing to adapt their moderate values to a unified Party effort in support of their electoral allies.

³³ "Cosponsors: S.1041 — 110th Congress (2007-2008)," Congress.gov, accessed March 20, 2015, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/senate-bill/1041/cosponsors>.

³⁴ Martha M. Hamilton, "Change in control of the House probably dooms any chance of passage," *PolitiFact*, April 20, 2011, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/obameter/promise/43/sign-the-employee-free-choice-act-making-it-easier/>.

³⁵ Michael O'Brien, "Obama says he'll 'keep on fighting' to pass 'card check' bill," *The Hill*, August 4, 2010, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/112613-obama-says-hell-keep-on-fighting-to-pass-card-check-bill>.

The Democratic Party was once the driving force behind key legislation and rules that supported the labor movement, such as the Wagner Act and Kennedy's Executive Order 10988. There has been no major pro-labor legislation since the 1960s – and instead, since the 1990s there have been several pieces of legislation put in place by the Democratic Party that the labor movement opposes. As of early 2015, labor support for the Democrats is primarily about specific limited policy areas and keeping Republicans out of power. Republicans have moved so far to the right and have become so extremely opposed to labor unions that labor cannot afford to abandon the Democrats. Democratic Party support for the labor movement has dissolved into supporting specific policy areas as needed in the interest of maintaining labor's help in campaigns and elections. The lack of cohesion within the Democratic Party today in regards to labor policy has weakened the Democratic Party as well as the labor movement. With only segments of the party committed to fighting for pro-labor legislation, the Party spends its political capital disparately and inefficiently.

As Democrats have shifted away from supporting overarching labor policy in favor of specific limited policy areas, certain labor unions have adapted by prioritizing more specific policy areas as well. Teachers' unions at the national level and at the state level have a great deal of political power that they are using in an attempt to push Democratic politicians away from education reform policy and towards education policy that respects and includes teachers' unions and other opponents of the reform movement. The next part of this thesis will explore the growth and politicization of teachers' unions, and examine their place within American politics in relation to the rest of the labor movement and the Democratic Party. The focus will be on their political power in the electoral process.

Chapter 2: History of the development and politicization of teachers' unions

Teachers' unions have their roots in professional associations that traditionally included – and were led by – school administrators. The NEA was founded in 1857 and for many years served as a way for educators to share teaching experiences. For most of its existence, the NEA has not been an aggressive or outwardly-focused organization, and the inclusion of administrators meant that the NEA advocated only for practices beneficial to teachers and administrators both.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has its roots in Chicago. The Chicago Teachers Federation (CTF) became the first teachers-only organization when it was founded in 1897 by Margaret Haley and Catherine Goggin. Because the majority of teachers were women who remained without the right to vote, Haley established an alliance between the CTF and the blue-collar, male-dominated Chicago Federation of Labor to give the nascent CTF real political clout. In 1902, the CTF led the nation's first teachers' strike when a popular longtime teacher was perceived to have been undeservedly and harshly punished by a new principal.³⁶

The AFT was founded in 1916 and brought together the teacher union locals from major cities around the country. The AFT, which affiliated with the AFL-CIO, remained small compared to the NEA, with only 59,000 members by 1960.³⁷ Meanwhile, at that time the NEA had about 766,000 members.³⁸ The AFT was founded with the intention of being a more politically active organization than the NEA, but its powers were limited because both collective bargaining and striking were illegal. AFT members focused on continually building their

³⁶ “The Chicago Strike and the History of American Teachers’ Unions,” last modified September 12, 2012, <http://www.danagoldstein.com/2012/09/the-chicago-strike-and-the-history-of-american-teachers-unions.html>.

³⁷ Terry Moe, *Special Interest: teachers unions and America's public schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2011), 46.

³⁸ Terry Moe, “A Union by Any Other Name,” *Education Next*, Fall 2001, Vol. 1, No. 3. Accessed April 20, 2015. <http://educationnext.org/a-union-by-any-other-name/>.

organizational capacity so as to be able to take advantage of the right opportunity to push for legislation recognizing a right to organize.

The moment that sparked the early political activism and militancy – and later the sustained influence – of the American teachers’ union movement came in 1960 in New York City, when then-Mayor Robert Wagner backed out of a promise to allow an official election for teachers to decide whether they wanted to bargain collectively through a union representative. In response, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) staged a one-day walkout protest. Only 5,000 of the city’s 50,000 teachers participated, but the union won a big victory.

Wagner soon authorized an election, and in 1961 New York City teachers voted to embrace collective bargaining and to endorse the UFT as their exclusive representative. The union then went to work, pressuring the city for “a substantial pay raise, free lunch periods, check-off for union dues, and one hundred and forty seven other items dealing with workplace conditions.” When the concessions weren’t forthcoming, UFT leader Al Shanker [...] called a strike. The strike was illegal under New York state law, but Shanker called for it anyway – and out the teachers went.³⁹

The resulting strike had immediate results for teachers’ unions, and for labor relations more broadly.

Although less than half of the teachers – 20,000 of them – walked off the job, they won a sweeping victory: the nation’s first major collective bargaining contract in public education, a large pay increase, a duty-free lunch, and other workplace concessions. The state’s tough no-strike law was essentially ignored, and teachers throughout the country saw that by getting organized into unions and taking forceful action on their own behalf they too could win great victories.⁴⁰

The UFT success in New York City was a catalyst for widespread and effective organizing of America’s teachers. The AFT and leaders in the labor movement rushed to

³⁹ Moe, *Special Interest*, 46.

⁴⁰ Moe, *Special Interest*, 47.

organize teachers around the country, having realized their potential for significant political power based on the sheer number of public school teachers around the country— teachers outnumbered all other public sector workers. Powerful teachers' unions could boost the power of the labor movement and support those Democratic allies who were pushing for labor-friendly laws.⁴¹

Just prior to the UFT's strikes in New York City, Wisconsin had become the first state to legalize collective bargaining for public sector workers in 1959, and other states adopted similar laws in the following years. This meant that public school teachers were organizing around the country at the same time that states were starting to recognize their unions. In January of 1962, President Kennedy followed suit and fulfilled a campaign promise by signing Executive Order 10988, which recognized the right to collective bargaining for public sector workers in the federal government.

As the AFT scrambled to organize members, the NEA was pressured to change its model in order to compete and retain its membership. To ignore the new movement would probably have meant the end of the NEA. Instead, the NEA shifted away from being a professional organization and towards unionism during the 1960s, and joined the effort to organize teachers for collective bargaining around the country. The NEA formally declared itself a labor union in 1969, and as it continued to organize teachers into local unions, it competed with the AFT through the 1970s for the right to organize affiliate unions in disputed urban districts. Ultimately the NEA was successful in maintaining its dominance as the preeminent teachers' union in the United States, and has remained so to this day.⁴²

⁴¹ Moe, *Special Interest*, 47.

⁴² Moe, *Special Interest*, 47.

The AFT endorsed Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter in 1976, and the NEA endorsed him as well soon after, thereby adapting to its newly political role with a first presidential endorsement.⁴³

By the 1980s, America's teachers' unions had become an institution, with unionization and collective bargaining seen as normal around the country (with the exception of southern states, where there remained strong resistance to collective bargaining).⁴⁴ By 1978, the percentage of teachers covered by collective bargaining was 65 percent, up from zero in 1960. That number represents an equilibrium that has remained fairly constant up through very recently, with 63 percent covered by collective bargaining in 2008.⁴⁵ The percentage of teachers who are members of unions is higher, and data from 1993 through 2008 shows that the percentage has hovered around 80 percent during that time.⁴⁶ The reason that this number is higher than those covered by collective bargaining is that even in the states where there is little or no collective bargaining, a large portion of teachers are members of unions. Recent data show that the lowest percentages of union membership are in South Carolina (28 percent), Mississippi (35 percent), and North Carolina (49 percent).⁴⁷ And nearly every single one of those local unions are affiliates of the NEA or the AFT, which means that the power of unionized teachers is concentrated in the national unions and can be directed very effectively.

The teachers' unions have the highest percentages of participation among sectors of the labor movement, and they also have the largest numbers of members. As of 2011, the NEA counted about 3.3 million members, with most of them being K-12 teachers, and none of them

⁴³ Gene Maeroff, "Shanker's Group Endorses Carter; Teacher Federation to Work for Democrats Backing by N.E.A. Is Expected," *The New York Times*, August 20, 1976.

⁴⁴ Moe, *Special Interest*, 48.

⁴⁵ Moe, *Special Interest*, 48.

⁴⁶ Moe, *Special Interest*, 48.

⁴⁷ Moe, *Special Interest*, 60.

being administrators.⁴⁸ Not only is the NEA the largest teachers' union, but it is the largest union of any sector in the United States. The AFT had about 1.4 million members in 2010. Although the AFT differs from the NEA by including non-teachers as a large portion of its members, those members are otherwise associated with education, and therefore it retains a strong and dominant interest in teachers and with education policy. Some examples of non-teacher members include school janitors, bus drivers, and secretaries, as well as higher education faculty and professional staff.⁴⁹ The NEA and the AFT remain separate unions at the national level and in nearly every state, but there are some states in which the two affiliates have been merged. As a result, there is some overlap in membership. Nevertheless, it is apparent that members of the NEA and AFT together number about 4.5 million teachers and related professionals around the United States.

Members of the NEA and the AFT have resisted several attempts to combine forces. Each time, an influential reason for failure to merge was reluctance by NEA members to join with a union that is affiliated with the AFL-CIO, as is the case with the AFT.⁵⁰ This reluctance stems from the NEA's origins as an organization of members of the professional class who saw labor unions as a tool for members of the working class.

Political Power

Teachers' unions are first and foremost labor unions that exist to protect and promote the rights of their members. Teachers do better when students succeed, and teachers with professional ambitions will want high student achievement that reflects well on their teaching abilities. Studies have also confirmed the intuitive idea that teachers choose their profession because they enjoy working with young people, and because they want to make a difference in

⁴⁸ Moe, *Special Interest*, 49.

⁴⁹ Moe, *Special Interest*, 50.

⁵⁰ Steven Greenhouse, "Teachers Reject Merger of Unions by Large Margin," *The New York Times*, July 6, 1998.

students' lives.⁵¹ Therefore, to say that teachers' unions are always fighting for their own interests with no regard for student interests is to present a very one-sided, and false, perspective. However, it is true that teachers' unions fight for labor rights for teachers, and for rules that benefit teachers, such as wage increases tied to higher education, limited work hours, and hiring and firing policies to give teachers greater job security.

In the American education system, although the national government has become more involved since the mid-20th century, power remains concentrated in the states, and so that is where teachers' unions focus their time and energy.⁵² Political activism is crucial for teachers because the rules of their workplace are dependent upon governments that have the ability to enact laws that create sweeping changes. Teachers' unions have political power that can help them to convince legislators to make drastic changes that they want, but the corollary is that they must constantly be on alert, mobilized, and ready to defend against education reforms that contradict their interests.

In his book *Special Interest*, Terry Moe studies teacher union influence on local school board elections. He finds that teacher union endorsements carry tremendous weight for non-incumbent candidates, and allow them to compete in their campaigns just as effectively as incumbents, who traditionally enjoy a strong advantage in running for re-election.⁵³ Although this study is skewed because school board elections are probably the elections in which teachers' unions have the largest influence, the means of influence are also effective in larger elections such as gubernatorial elections.

⁵¹ Kate O'Connor, "You choose to care: Teachers, emotions and professional identity," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 24, Issue 1 (2008): 117 – 126, accessed January 20, 2015, doi: [10.1016/j.tate.2006.11.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.11.008).

⁵² Moe, *Special Interest*, 276.

⁵³ Moe, *Special Interest*, 151.

Teachers' unions derive their power from several related factors: their large membership, their spending power based on income from membership dues, their strong cohesion between different levels of unions, and their high level of organization in political activism.

A large membership gives a union a correspondingly large political reach. Although members do not have homogeneous political views, leadership of the union is able to communicate with all members of the union to invite them to participate in political activity. The corollary is that teachers' unions have a significant ability to rally participants for political activity, and can contribute to campaigns by knocking on doors, calling voters, and spreading a message by word of mouth.

Teachers' unions are among the best-funded politically active organizations in the United States. Moe gives a simple illustration of the money that teachers' unions have to draw on, saying that if about 4.5 million members pay \$600 in dues annually, then dues alone add up to \$2.7 billion annually.⁵⁴ This money is, of course, not all directed to political activity, but the unions have a large base to draw on for funding their political action committees. When it comes to campaigns, teachers' unions spend money on direct contact with voters through mailings and other advertising, by donating directly to campaigns, and by donating directly to party committees.

While teachers' unions focus their political energy at the state level, teachers' unions also spend tremendous sums at the national level— even compared with other political donors. From 1989 through 2009, the AFT and NEA combined contributed \$59.4 million to national campaigns, which made them the number one political contributor for that time period among

⁵⁴ Moe, *Special Interest*, 280.

the top twenty-five all-time donors in federal elections between 1989 and 2010. In second place is AT&T, at \$45.7 million.⁵⁵ See Appendix B for reference.

Teachers' unions contribute overwhelmingly to Democrats, who have received between 88 and 99 percent of the AFT and NEA's contributions at the national level between 2006 and 1994, and between 80 and 90 percent of contributions at the state level.⁵⁶

A particular strength of teachers' unions is their strong cohesion between the different levels of unions, at the district level, state level, and national level. As national unions, the NEA and AFT are umbrella organizations for nearly every single one of the state and district unions. Occasionally, state- or district- level unions are affiliated with both the NEA and the AFT. Politically, the cohesive organizational structure means that a union endorsement carries more clout. A union that endorses a candidate is able to appeal to affiliate members for additional financial resources. If affiliate unions rally around the same candidate, then their message will resonate further and more loudly in the electoral process.

It also means that, for education policy, teachers' unions are advocating for similar, and often identical, policies all across the country. This is true even in very disparate school districts. When considering specific education reforms in a particular region, district and state-level unions must heavily consider the national union's positions when they make their political endorsements. For example, in a small city where charter schools have been generally successful, if a mayoral candidate publicly announces support for charter schools, the local NEA affiliate will automatically be much less likely to support that pro-charter candidate because the official position of the NEA is to oppose and limit charter schools.

⁵⁵ Moe, *Special Interest*, 282.

⁵⁶ Moe, *Special Interest*, 283.

Overall, the teachers' unions' high level of organization contributes to their being highly effective in political activities. In brief, teachers' unions are good at what they do. They are successful organizers whose reputation alone carries a lot of weight even before they invest time, money, and human capital in support of a political candidate. Although this paper is focused on the electoral process, teachers' unions are also successful lobbyists at all levels of government, and any candidate must keep that in mind when they are running for office. Teachers' unions have become well-established within their relatively short lifespan, and other players in the political process may look to them for a barometric reading of an electoral race.

Teachers' unions are at the top of the list of most generous political contributors in federal elections from 1989 to 2010, and in addition to financial strength they are notably well-organized, even relative to other very well-funded political organizations. But their level of organization for political activity is not what makes teachers' unions stand out the most from this list of the top twenty-five contributors to national campaigns. Rather, the NEA and the AFT together are the only groups in this list to have a special interest in education policy. Other policy areas are represented, such as communications, banking, and labor policy. The NEA and AFT's combined presence in this list of top contributors means that they have a position from which to advocate for specific education policies.⁵⁷ These unions recognize and take full advantage of this power. The other indication that teachers' unions would choose to specifically advocate for education policies is that within the top contributors, there are other unions, from both the public and private sectors, which represent teachers' unions' labor interests. AFSCME and the SEIU are both among the top twelve, and they can advocate for the interests of public sector unions. Other labor unions including private sector unions such as the United Auto Workers (UAW) are also top contributors, and are influential in terms of general labor rights. The NEA and AFT are

⁵⁷ Moe, *Special Interest*, 282.

uniquely well-positioned to focus nearly all of their efforts on education policy in their political activity.

Teachers' Unions and Education Reform

The education reform movement is borne out of a desire shared by those within the movement and those in opposition – the desire to improve American schools. Yet there is no agreement about the best policies to create great schools. There is agreement that our society's deep-rooted economic and social inequalities perpetuate differences between students and schools, and that to truly fix American schools, we must ameliorate problems of poverty, racism, and other social inequalities. But from the school level, there is no reliable formula for generating student achievement. As a result, we cannot determine with absolute certainty whether the education policies advocated for by teachers' unions are policies that will benefit students, or whether they are policies that will have a neutral or even negative effect. What we can say for certain is that teachers' unions are advocating for education policies that give them the best professional benefits, working conditions, and safeguards, because that is their purpose as a labor union. Teachers' unions choose to exert their political influence on education policy debates in order to ultimately do the most good for their members because it is in that arena that their power is most unique and therefore greatest. I will delve into the relationship between teachers' unions and the current education reform movement in my next chapter.

Electoral Endorsements

Theoretical Context

Within the abundance of existing literature about campaigns, there is a fair amount that includes exploration and analysis of the role of endorsements in campaigns. But very few texts attempt to directly correlate endorsements with electoral outcomes. There are authors that examine the political activity of teachers' unions, including their policy aims and the outcomes they achieve. Yet there is not a specific focus on teachers' unions' electoral activity and the effect that their endorsements may have on Democratic partisan politics—how Democrats may shape policy positions in response to or in pursuit of teacher union endorsements.

There are theories about how endorsements matter in campaigns, including the relative value of union endorsements. Rapoport, Stone and Abramowitz compared union and women's groups' endorsements, and found union endorsements to be more effective because of the particular relationship between union members and the leadership of their organization.⁵⁸ Because unions are workplace-based organizations, there is more consistent contact between leadership and members, and members on average are easier to organize for participation in political activity. Several authors have written about how voters use endorsements as a heuristic for deciding which candidate to support, and have elaborated that union or group endorsements are relevant to their members, and also to others outside of the group who look to the endorsement as an indication of a candidate's position.^{59, 60} This point about heuristics is crucial

⁵⁸ Ronald Rapoport, Walter Stone and Alan Abramowitz, "Do Endorsements Matter? Group Influence in the 1984 Democratic Caucuses," *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 85, No. 1 (1991): 193-203, accessed November 20, 2014, retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1962885>.

⁵⁹ Donald Wittman, "Candidate quality, pressure group endorsements and the nature of political advertising," *European Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 23, Issue 2 (2007): 360-378, accessed November 20, 2014, doi: [10.1016/j.ejpolco.2006.01.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpolco.2006.01.004).

⁶⁰ Monika McDermott, "Not for Members Only: Group Endorsements as Electoral Information Cues," *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (2006): 249-257, accessed November 20, 2014,

to my argument because it is one of the major ways that union endorsements help a campaign, apart from the volunteer capacity that union endorsements frequently bring to a campaign.

There is another segment of literature that considers unions' political activities. This includes analysis of how, why and when unions engage in political activities during elections.⁶¹ There are articles about the strength and value of union endorsements, including some articles about teachers' unions in particular.⁶² There are also articles about elections in which similar unions split their endorsement among different candidates. The split endorsements seemed to have a larger impact when a union endorsed one of the candidates whom no one expected, such as a police union in Wisconsin endorsing anti-union Governor Scott Walker.^{63, 64}

The Value of Endorsements

Endorsements are an important part of most campaigns. In most campaigns, it is impossible for candidates to speak with all of the voters personally, and so they must rely on other means of communicating with voters. Endorsements by big organizations offer several

doi: 10.1177/106591290605900207.

⁶¹ Taylor Dark III, "To Reward and Punish: A Classification of Union Political Strategies," *Journal of Labor Research*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2003): 457-472, accessed November 20, 2014, retrieved from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12122-003-1008-z#page-1>.

⁶² Jamaal Abdul-Alim, "Union Endorsements Carry Weight," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 21, 2010, accessed November 20, 2014, retrieved from ProQuest.

Nancy Kaffer, "Election calls into question strength of union endorsement," *Crain's Detroit Business*, Vol. 25, No. 19 (2009): 32, accessed November 20, 2014.

Phil Kabler, "DeLong gets teachers union endorsement," *The Charleston Gazette*, September 25, 2007, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-13971180.html>.

Marc Longpre, "Endorsements retain electoral prestige," *PR Week (US)*, February 5, 2008, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.prweek.com/article/1254124/endorsements-retain-electoral-prestige>.

Steven Greenhouse, "Endorsement from unions offers boost, but how big?" *New York Times*, January 27, 2008, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/us/politics/27unions.html?pagewanted=all>.

Betty Sundquist, "Union endorsements: How Big A Factor?" *Finance & Commerce*, November 25, 2009, accessed November 20, 2014, retrieved from Lexis Nexis.

⁶³ Jonathan Lemire, "Unions in New York City's Central Labor Council Split Endorsements," *New York Daily News*, May 25, 2013, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/election/labor-unions-split-mayoral-endorsements-article-1.1354806>.

⁶⁴ Kyle Maichle, "Wisconsin governor's race: Two police unions endorse different candidates," *Wisconsin Election Watch*, September 25, 2014, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://wisconsinelectionwatch.com/21513/two-wisconsin-police-unions-split-endorsements-for-governor-lieutenant-governor/>.

benefits to candidates, including making the work of voter outreach easier for campaigns, and easing the decision-making process for voters. Additionally, endorsements have a multiplied effect through media coverage, especially because the modern media has a tendency to cover the horse race aspect of campaigns, and endorsements offer a means for news outlets to quantify candidates' relative positions in the days and weeks leading up to Election Day.

Voter outreach, called “field,” is one of the most important elements of electioneering today. Field efforts include calling voters, knocking on doors, and distributing literature – and all of those activities require volunteers because campaigns do not have enough money to hire employees to do all of the necessary work. Endorsements by unions often come with money, which is the way that many groups and individuals show support for a campaign, but union endorsements are special because of the human resources that are frequently contributed as well. Unions are more likely than other types of organizations to bring volunteers to a campaign that they endorse. Rapoport, Stone and Abramowitz examined the level of support for Walter Mondale in the 1984 presidential primary among endorsing groups, and distinguished between unions and women's groups as workplace-based groups and non-workplace-based groups. The authors found that support for Mondale was significantly higher among members of the workplace-based groups when their organization endorsed Mondale.⁶⁵ In terms of campaign strategy, this would mean that it would benefit voter outreach efforts more to seek endorsements from workplace-based-groups, of which unions are the most established and well-organized. Furthermore, unions, as organized labor, depend for their very existence on their ability to organize the members of a workplace and make many of the same requests that a political campaign must make of its voters. A union must organize membership drives, ask members to

⁶⁵ Rapoport, Stone, and Abramowitz, “Do Endorsements Matter? Group Influence in the 1984 Democratic Caucuses.”

participate as volunteers for outreach, and even persuade members to participate in union elections. This institutional experience leads union endorsements to be valuable to the voter outreach aspects of a political campaign.

For voters, choosing a candidate can be a difficult task, as it can be hard to differentiate between individuals in a field of candidates in any meaningful way. Voters frequently rely on party identification to inform their choices at the polls, and in fact, party identification is usually so strong that voters rationalize their support for candidates of their own parties and are blinded from seeing reasons to vote for someone from the other party.⁶⁶ Yet there are races in which party identification is not a distinguishing feature, as in partisan primaries where the candidates – and the great majority of voters – are from the same political party. Endorsements offer an easy alternative way for voters to determine a candidate's political beliefs and values. Several authors have written about how voters use endorsements as a heuristic for deciding which candidate to support. It is logical that members of the group that endorses a candidate would trust their leadership's decision and would choose to vote for that candidate, but there is evidence that the influence of a group endorsement extends beyond members of the group. Voters outside of a group that has well-known political views look to that endorsement to provide clues about a candidate's position. Voters may base their entire decision-making process on heuristics such as endorsements, especially in low-information races.

Monika Mcdermott conducted a study in the early 2000s and found that for Democratic candidates in low information elections, both Republican and Democratic voters reacted when the AFL-CIO endorsed. Liberals became significantly more supportive, while conservatives became significantly less supportive of the endorsed candidate, compared with races where the

⁶⁶ Taber, Charles and Milton Lodge, *The Rationalizing Voter*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

AFL-CIO did not endorse.⁶⁷ McDermott elaborates that voters use endorsements as a heuristic most in low-information races, because “voters frequently lack either the means or the motivation to inform themselves fully in all elections in which they choose to participate.” Endorsements provide a minimal amount of electoral education for voters who would otherwise choose to cast a ballot at the polls without knowing anything about the candidates. McDermott considers labor unions in particular, and says that a labor union endorsement of a candidate should signal to that the endorsed candidate is more liberal than non-endorsed candidates of the same party.⁶⁸ She finds that in a Democrat-Republican race, “liberals are more likely to support the Democratic candidate when the AFL-CIO endorses that candidate than they are to support the Democratic candidate when neither candidate is endorsed.” McDermott’s findings support my theory that Democratic candidates stand to benefit from union endorsements relative to other Democrats, and that candidates should take care to prevent their opponents to acquiring union endorsements that may be inaccessible to themselves.

Role of Media Regarding Endorsements

It is important to recognize that electoral endorsements do not occur in a vacuum. Most information about candidates is transmitted to voters through the news media, and endorsements can have an important influence on the way that the media covers particular candidates. In the final part of the election, media coverage plays a very important role in creating and contributing to momentum, which can be decisive in a race. In discussing momentum, it is important to consider how the news of an endorsement is disseminated. Several authors have written about which aspects of campaigns the media prefers to cover. One popular finding is that the media is

⁶⁷ McDermott, “Not for Members Only: Group Endorsements as Electoral Information Cues.”

⁶⁸ McDermott, Monika. “Not for Members Only: Group Endorsements as Electoral Information Cues,” 251.

more receptive to logistical campaign information, and much less receptive to substantive, issue-oriented information.⁶⁹ Coverage of logistical information leads media to talk about the horse race aspects of campaigns, and that includes endorsements and other information that compare the relative status of campaigns. Horse race coverage comes at the expense of news stories that compare the candidates' values, leadership abilities, or issue-positions. Because there are so many factors in a campaign, it is difficult to determine at any one point prior to the election who is ahead in the race. But the stories that sell in newspapers and magazines are sensationalist articles that claim to know which candidate will win, and for that reason, the media looks for quantifiable information that they can use to compare candidates. They seek out and cover polling results, information about fundraising numbers and campaign expenses, and also compile lists of endorsements.

When the media reports on endorsements, non-endorsements by large and influential organizations often come across as more of a repudiation of a candidate than as a neutral abstention. This perception is especially true when historical context in a news story reveals that an organization has previously chosen to endorse for that position, or even that exact candidate, in prior campaigns.

It is true that very often an organization has a pre-determined methodology for endorsing candidates, and that if no candidate matches their requirements, the organization will abstain from endorsing anyone. However, organizations are acting politically when they make endorsement decisions, and therefore do not always follow their strict methodologies. In circumstances where news outlets are publishing extensive coverage of endorsements that seem to be all in favor of one candidate, it creates a sense of inevitability that that candidate will win,

⁶⁹ Katherine Seelye, "Horse Race Prevails in Campaign Reporting," *The New York Times*, October 29, 2007, accessed November 20, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/29/business/media/29coverage.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0.

especially when polls corroborate that candidate's apparent lead. In that case, organizations who have refrained from endorsing throughout the duration of the campaign will feel pressure to endorse the leading candidate, and to ignore their rigid endorsement process. This is because these organizations have agendas that will be advanced by supporting the eventual winner, and that could be harmed by supporting the winner's opponent. Therefore, media coverage of endorsements puts pressure on other organizations to endorse as well, and there is a snowball effect in favor of the perceived leader. In that context, the decision to stand fast and refrain from endorsing stands out among other campaign news coverage and gains significance.

To summarize, teachers' unions became political in the 1960s, and today their political power comes from high membership, organization, reputation, and is often manifested through their use of those assets during elections. The two national teachers' unions, the AFT and the NEA, together represent the most wealthy and prolific campaign contributors who are concerned with education policy. As labor unions, teachers' unions approach education policy with the best interest of their members in mind. Teachers' unions political history has lead them to be consistent allies of the Democratic Party, but the relationship between teachers' unions and the Democrats has become more complicated with the rise of the education reform movement. In my next chapter I will discuss education reform and the teachers' unions' place within American politics relative to that movement.

Chapter 3: Education reform in the United States

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the modern education reform movement and its place in American politics today. Within the context of this paper, “education reform” refers to a very specific movement characterized by the promotion of a set of policies that assume that it is possible to isolate schools and learning from wider societal problems. I will explain the five common policies of education reform, including standardized testing, performance-based pay, charter schools, professional development for teachers, and increased education funding. There are varying levels of agreement between interested parties regarding the effectiveness of those five tools. The chapter continues by detailing those organizations and groups that have a stake in the education reform movement, and concludes by placing those organizations and the education reform movement as a whole within the electoral process. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the terms “education reformers” and “opponents of education reform” to distinguish between those on different sides of the movement.

Why is education reform happening now?

There has been heightened awareness of the importance of education for the last few decades, especially since the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk*, a report commissioned by President Ronald Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report backed up claims that American schools were in decline and were failing students. Attention to education reform has been sustained in recent years in part because of the economic crash in 2008 and subsequent recession. Policymakers are sensitive to the perceived status of the American economy and of American institutions like the public schools. The American

exceptionalism theory remains influential in the minds of policymakers at all levels of government, and those political leaders feel threatened by American students' low academic performance relative to students in other countries around the world. Some reformers want to emphasize science and technology in order to prepare students for technology jobs and careers, while others view excellent education more holistically, and see education as a cure for social ills and socioeconomic inequalities. All believe that drastic changes are needed.

What is Education Reform?

Education reform is aggressive approach to education policy, with the intention of “fixing” school systems. The education reform movement assumes that American public schools are failing, and that it is possible to isolate schools and learning from wider societal problems in making changes that are designed to produce the improved educational outcomes that reformers seek. Reformers believe that increased funding is not the answer, and that instead, accountability is crucial. The education reform movement is heavily focused on teachers, and many adherents of the reform movement subscribe to the basic philosophy that if you can put a great teacher in front of students, then the students will learn. One irony of the education reform movement is that reformers seek to close the achievement gap that exists between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds without recognizing that the causes of that gap originate outside of the classroom.

Because the recent education reform movement was catalyzed by the release of *A Nation at Risk* under the Reagan administration, education reform has largely been an initiative championed by Republicans. That perception has persevered even though Democratic President Bill Clinton advocated for state standards measured by standardized testing and claimed

measurable progress during his presidency.⁷⁰ In 2002, George Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act, “which [used] student performance on tests to measure teachers and schools; it [could] lead to bonuses or firing for teachers, and sanctions and even closure for schools.”⁷¹ No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was a true bipartisan effort at the time of its passage, but it has since developed the reputation of being a Republican cause. Democrats took advantage of NCLB’s association with Republican President Bush to distance themselves from the legislation after it became widely recognized as a political failure by the voting public. Many parents blame NCLB for schools that are “teaching to the test,” while those on the left protest the law for promoting education reform, and those on the right say that NCLB is an example of overreach by the federal government.⁷² President Obama, although hailed by progressives as one of their own, has governed as much more of a centrist Democrat when it comes to education, and he has supported education reform. He chose as his Secretary of Education Arne Duncan from Chicago, who has been an advocate for charter schools. Obama’s Race to the Top program served in some ways as a modification of NCLB, offering significant financial incentives to states that agreed to sign on to various elements of education reform, including performance-based pay for teachers, raising the cap on charter schools, and developing and adopting common standards.

What are the tools of education reform?

Education reform, in its current form, is largely a push for test-based standards as part of an attempt to hold teachers and administrators accountable for the success of their students.

⁷⁰ “The Clinton Presidency: Expanding Education Opportunity,” The Clinton White House, last modified in 2000, <http://clinton5.nara.gov/WH/Accomplishments/eightyears-05.html>.

⁷¹ David Denby, “Public Defender,” *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2012, accessed January 3, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/11/19/public-defender>.

⁷² Maggie Severns, “The plot to overhaul No Child Left Behind,” *Politico*, January 2, 2015, accessed January 3, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/01/the-plot-to-overhaul-no-child-left-behind-113857.html>.

Making changes to systems of education is very complicated, and the education reform movement is difficult to define concisely. By breaking it down by methods of reform, I am able to offer a fairly clear picture of the movement. This method also makes it easier to understand claims by opponents of education reform that these siloed policies are not complex or comprehensive enough to effect real change. They maintain that the policies of education reform are designed more like Band-Aids on poorly diagnosed wounds than effective medication for an overall ineffective education system. Opponents of education reform point out the gaping social inequalities in our country, and would like to see schools providing comprehensive social services for children, families, and neighborhoods in an attempt to bridge the achievement gap. Given that there is limited money, time, and political capital, opponents of reform would rather see changes made to systemic issues that lead to unequal education outcomes. However, it is precisely because of those limitations on resources that the education reform movement has gained as much traction as it has, for its methods offer relatively easily quantifiable measures of achievement.

A few methods of education reform are widely supported. They include the following:

Increased funding

The most vague, least complicated and therefore easiest proposal for improving public schools is to allocate more money for education funding. But when American politicians blame widespread school failure on a lack of funding, they ignore the fact that relative to other developed countries, the United States already spends a great deal of money per student on public education. According to a 2012 report published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United States ranked fifth out of 24 of the world's

most developed countries in amount of money spent on education, but scored only 17th on a test administered to students in those countries.⁷³ Students in the United States scored comparably to students in the Slovak Republic, although the United States spends more than twice as much per student.⁷⁴ Even within the United States, high funding levels do not always correspond with better school districts. The District of Columbia was among the worst performing school districts in the country in 2011, yet was spending \$18,475 per student, which was over \$7,000 more than the national average.⁷⁵

There is evidence that increased funding can be useful when directed in very specific ways, such as for programs supporting teachers with professional development or for early education programs for young children. It is not enough to simply advocate for more funding for public schools. Instead, policymakers must be specific about the programs that they would like to implement or expand with additional funds. The status quo today is to focus more often on broad advocacy of education funding without specifying how funds should be used.

Better training and professional development for teachers

Better training and professional development for teachers is one of the least controversial methods of education reform, and everyone agrees that teachers need proper training and support. The disagreement is focused on what form that should take, and how resources should be spent on training and support. Some reformers have claimed that current structures of higher education for teachers are ineffective, and that school districts are wasting money by encouraging teachers

⁷³ Julia Ryan, “American Schools vs. the World: Expensive, Unequal, Bad at Math,” *The Atlantic*, December 3, 2013, accessed January 30, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/12/american-schools-vs-the-world-expensive-unequal-bad-at-math/281983/>.

⁷⁴ I recognize that it is somewhat of a double standard to measure success of US spending with standardized tests while in the same section decrying the use of standardized testing. My point of clarification would be that I take issue with an overreliance on standardized tests, not their use in all circumstances.

⁷⁵ “Education Spending Per Student by State,” Governing Data, last modified May 2013, <http://www.governing.com/gov-data/education-data/state-education-spending-per-pupil-data.html>.

to pursue masters' degrees that do not make them better teachers in the classroom.⁷⁶ Teachers' unions want their members to be well-supported, but they may be inclined to compromise development programs in pursuit of better compensation for teachers in the form of higher salaries or services such as healthcare. Relative with other elements of education reform, this is one of the least-emphasized in the media and in political debates.

The next few methods of education reform are very controversial:

Standardized tests: frequent, high-stakes testing

Because education reform is mostly a top-down process, standardization is the most basic and widely-used tool, and it is used so that governing bodies can compare schools and allocate limited resources appropriately. School districts are frequently much smaller than even Congressional districts, let alone states and the nation itself. Fairly small school districts mean that for the state or federal governments to have a useful measurement of how well schools are performing, they must convince school districts to participate in the same standardized measures. Governments do not have the resources, or the willingness to obtain them, for evaluating schools or districts on an individual basis. Standardized measurements of achievement allow governments to do two things: First, collecting and publishing information about the relative status of different school districts provides motivation for districts to improve their relative standing. Second, if the government can determine which schools truly need the most help, then they can dedicate more resources to those schools. Standardized testing was prioritized in NCLB, and there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of testing in schools across the United States since the implementation of that law. Common Core further augmented the importance given to standardized tests when it encouraged states to use common curricular standards by

⁷⁶ Moe, *Special Interest*, 206.

providing funding contingent on adoption of those standards. Progress towards meeting these standards is of course measured by standardized tests.

These two means of standardization, both testing and common curricular standards, are heavily criticized by parents and teachers for forcing teachers to teach to the test and to take valuable classroom time away from instruction in order to administer the tests. They are also criticized for dis-incentivizing creative and engaging teaching methods in the classroom. The tests are very high-stakes, with thousands of dollars in state and national funding hinging on schools' success. Sometimes student performance may even determine whether or not a school is permitted to stay open. There have been several large-scale cheating scandals that give an indication of the pressure that these tests place on administrators and educators. A major cheating scandal in Atlanta, Georgia was uncovered in 2011 after suspiciously rapid test score growth was investigated. Teachers were found to have erased incorrect student answers. Other schools around the country have also been investigated for cheating on standardized tests, including in Texas, the District of Columbia, Birmingham, Alabama, and Chicago.⁷⁷

Performance-based pay: teachers are rewarded or penalized for their students' test results.

A corollary of frequent standardized testing is that teachers are judged according to their students' performance on the tests. Different districts that use test scores for teacher evaluations put different emphasis on rewarding teachers for good scores or penalizing teachers for poor scores. The Obama administration's Race to the Top program required participating states to adopt Value-Added Modeling, which is a data-driven method of determining how much a student learns in a given year. The tests used for this modeling are administered every year, and

⁷⁷ Lois Beckett, "America's Most Outrageous Teacher Cheating Scandals," *ProPublica*, April 1, 2013, <http://www.propublica.org/article/americas-most-outrageous-teacher-cheating-scandals>.

each student's performance for a given school year is predicted based on their test scores in the previous school year. Teachers are rewarded or penalized financially for their students' performance in that school year relative to the model's predictions.⁷⁸

Performance pay is one of the most immediately controversial elements of education reform. Although on the surface it seems fairly straight-forward to reward good teachers and to create incentives to keep those good teachers in the classroom, there are many complicating factors. It would be overly simplistic and ultimately inaccurate to assume that there is a baseline teacher salary that would be untouched by performance pay rewards or penalties. Teachers' unions fear that even without pay penalties, a performance pay system would lead school districts to lower the baseline salary and expect teachers to always perform at the level that would earn them so-called "bonus" pay. Second, there is strong evidence that standardized tests are not a consistently reliable measure of how much students have learned. Because tests are administered on one morning, or one day, there are many factors that affect how students perform that are completely outside of a teacher's control, including whether the student slept well the night before or ate a nutritious meal before the test. Socioeconomic background also has a significant influence on a student's ability to perform on standardized tests, and is completely out of the teacher's control.

There are some ongoing efforts to change and improve current teacher evaluation systems, but not on a large enough scale or with sufficient resources to have a big effect. A more comprehensive and fair teacher evaluation system would rely less heavily on standardized test scores, and would incorporate other measures like peer evaluations from other teachers.

⁷⁸ It is characteristic of the Obama administration to rely so heavily on data and modeling for measuring teacher ability and student learning. It is not, however, widely believed to actually help learning to have such high-stakes testing.

Increased flexibility and charter schools:

At the same time that governments are pushing for standardization, reformers are also advocating for increased flexibility and creativity in a few different ways. First, administrators want flexibility in hiring and firing teachers, and frequently cite examples of very negative outcomes arising from the “last in, first out” policy that is associated with teacher tenure. In 2012, a young Boston high school teacher was named Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, and then lost his job two weeks later when his school merged with another and administrators had to reduce the number of classroom teachers.⁷⁹ Stories like this one are cited and contrasted with horror stories about teachers who physically abuse children and are then protected by dense bureaucracy and tenure rules. Fantastic teachers losing their jobs and abusive teachers keeping theirs are examples of infrequent exceptions rather than the rule, but these are the cases that are told again and again, and they fuel education reformers’ desire to circumvent teachers’ unions’ workplace protections.

Charter schools are frequently cited as the answer to failing schools. Proponents of charters blame wasteful and absurdly slow bureaucratic school systems for failing schools, and say that with autonomy from burdensome regulations, and with freedom from union contracts, they can produce academic excellence. As they were originally conceived in the 1980s, charter schools were supported by Al Shanker of the AFT. Since then they have become a means of avoiding teacher contracts, and teachers’ unions have become the staunchest opponents of the charter movement. When Shanker laid out the idea for public charter schools in 1988, he described them as laboratories for innovative teaching methods that could then be copied and

⁷⁹ “From ‘Teacher of the Year’ to Teacher Without a Job,” *Radio Boston*, September 7, 2011, <http://radioboston.wbur.org/2011/09/07/teacher-of-the-year>.

applied in traditional public schools.⁸⁰ Within five years, as the charter idea took off and was implemented, charters became schools that were frequently run by outside entrepreneurs instead of by the teachers at the school, as was originally intended. Two education reformers in Minnesota took a leading role in writing legislation that set up a charter system run by statewide agencies. Their system encouraged competition instead of creative cooperation between charters and traditional district schools. Significantly, this also allowed charters to operate outside of the bounds of collective bargaining agreements negotiated between school districts and teachers' unions.⁸¹

Who is active in education reform and electoral politics?

The people and organizations involved in education advocacy are divided along different lines than are traditionally found in American politics. The line between education reformers and opponents of education reform does not fall clearly along the divide between Democrats and Republicans, nor even more broadly, between the traditional left and right. Most Republicans support education reform, and today, many centrist Democrats do as well. The line between education reformers and their opponents is now within the Democratic Party, where today there is a sharp divide between proponents and opponents of reform.

Education Reformers

Those on the side of education reform include primarily Democrats for Education Reform (DFER), and many influential individuals. The individuals are mostly wealthy Democrats with

⁸⁰ Richard D. Kahlenberg and Halley Potter, "The Original Charter School Vision," *The New York Times*, August 30, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/opinion/sunday/albert-shanker-the-original-charter-school-visionary.html?_r=0.

⁸¹ Paul E. Peterson, "No, Al Shanker Did Not Invent the Charter School," *Education Next*, July 21, 2010, accessed January 30, 2015, <http://educationnext.org/no-al-shanker-did-not-invent-the-charter-school/>.

self-funded education initiatives, and include both businessmen and elected officials. One group of education reformers, deemed the “Billionaire Boys Club” by one of the most vocal opponents of education reform, Diane Ravitch, includes Bill Gates.

Bill Gates is one of the most well-known education reformers, and is in large part responsible for the Common Core standards. Other wealthy reformers include Eli and Edyth Broad, the Walton Family, Michael Bloomberg, and New Jerseyans David Tepper and Alan Fournier, who are Democrats but who have supported Republican Governor Chris Christie on education policies. Senator Cory Booker is one of the New Democrats who espouse education reform, and Michelle Rhee, former Chancellor of Schools in Washington, D.C., has been one of the most high-profile practitioners of controversial education reform.

Democrats for Education Reform was founded in 2007, and part of its influence comes from its participation in electoral politics. DFER offers financial resources and consulting to candidates that they want to support, in addition to paid canvassers for campaigns.

Opponents of Education Reform

On the side of opponents to education reform, the largest organizations are the two national teachers’ unions and a newly formed group called Democrats for Public Education. Like in the reform movement, there are also notable individuals. Diane Ravitch has become a leader in the anti-reform movements, and she has been prolific with several books and a blog that she updates more than once a day. Ravitch is a compelling figure because of her strong convictions, and even more so because she completely reversed her original thinking in order to arrive where she stands today. Ravitch was Assistant Secretary of Education under President George H. W. Bush, and was one of the early advocates of testing and accountability in the public schools. In

2007, she started to switch her views, perceiving testing as going much too far. As of 2015, she is perhaps the most high profile opponent of education reform. There are other determined opponents, including current teachers who have taken a stand individually. In 2014, a Florida kindergarten teacher very vocally refused to administer a Florida state test to her students. Because of the attention she received, she kept her job, and brought positive attention to the movement.⁸²

The NEA and the AFT are the most powerful opponents of the education reform movement. Of the five tools of education reform described previously, the teachers' unions are opposed to standardized testing, performance-based pay for teachers, and the charter school movement. Teachers' unions are distinct among the labor movement; they have a strong interest in an aspect of public policy outside of labor policy. They care strongly about education policy, and because they are so well-established, teachers' unions can have a substantive influence in education policy decisions. In the case of education reform, teachers' unions' power has been more of a blocking power than a proactive, creative policymaking ability. It is important to recognize that teachers' unions' interest in education policy originates from their identity as a labor union dedicated to fighting for the interests of their members as employees. Teachers' unions' opposition to certain elements of education reform comes from a desire to preserve their members' discretion over their own work and classrooms. Teachers' unions oppose reforms that grant administrators increased autonomy with hiring and firing decisions because it takes away from teachers' ability to make decisions about their own classrooms.

Democrats for Public Education was founded in 2014 by former Ohio governor Ted Strickland and Democratic operative Donna Brazille. Democrats for Public Education include

⁸² Valerie Strauss, "Florida drops test after kindergarten teacher took public stand against it," *The Washington Post*, September 15, 2014, accessed January 30, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/09/15/florida-drops-test-after-kindergarten-teacher-took-public-stand-against-it/>.

many members from the more traditionally progressive component of the Democratic Party, and the organization's mission statement says that it is "about Democrats standing up for our principals, standing up for teachers, standing up for kids and standing up for public education."⁸³ The organization was created in response to the education reform movement, and so its goals are presently more protective of public education than proactive in changing the system.

Corporatization/Privatization Fears

In 2015, the education reform movement is primarily a top-down effort led by very wealthy people, and is exclusive of individuals without personal political influence, the majority of which are teachers. That exclusion of the very people who educate America's children is one of the reasons that opponents of reform are so vocal and steadfast. Michael Bloomberg's philanthropic organization has an Education Initiative focused on leadership and policy, and its mission statement says nothing about teachers.⁸⁴ The exclusion of teachers from education policy discussions and decision-making worsens the lack of trust between education reformers and their opponents. Another reason that there is mistrust towards reformers is that they appear to be capitalizing off education reform policies. Opponents of education reform are not against all changes in education and education policy, and they too say that they want the schools to be great. But when changes are made for the sake of making a profit, there is staunch opposition.

Corporate education reform is a tagline that is touted as a great evil that must be combated. There are fears that increased testing is being promoted more as a means of supporting a testing industry than of measuring success. There are fears that support for charter

⁸³ "About," Democrats for Public Education, last modified 2014, <http://www.democratsforpubliceducation.com/about/>.

⁸⁴ "Overview," Bloomberg Philanthropies, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.org/program/education/?gclid=CJeG9CX-MICFWRp7Aod2hoANA#overview>.

schools means support for exclusive, discriminating schools where taxpayer dollars are funneled towards administrators and outside consultants through voucher-like systems. Finally, non-reformers and teachers' unions especially view the education reform movement as a thinly-veiled attempt to wrest power from teachers' unions and significantly weaken the labor movement as a whole.

These fears often make their way into the general political sphere in the form of dramatic rhetoric that more often comes across as defensive than as contributing to constructive discussion. Opponents of education reform, and specifically teachers' unions, have been put into an incredibly difficult place where they are depicted as defenders of a status quo that is perceived to be defunct. As a result, the combative language that is used may alienate those who would naturally want to support teachers and opponents of the education reform movement. This is not unique to education policy, and we see that hyperbolic and fearmongering language in American politics can make those who are outside of politics dismissive of the fundamental concerns that are being expressed.

For example, Diane Ravitch, the education historian and prolific blogger, may be doing a disservice to opponents of education reform when she contributes to the dramatization by using combative language in her blog. The language that Ravitch uses certainly reflects real examples and valid overarching concerns. But it is easier for education reformers to dismiss the points that she makes by attacking her framing of the issues, rather than the analysis itself. On the other hand, Ravitch's strong language may make it easier for other ardent opponents of the education reform movement to appear more reasonable and closer to the center by couching similar arguments in softer language. In that way, having Ravitch appear so uncompromising and absolute may strengthen the overall power of opponents of education reform.

Even if they are overdramatized in political spheres, the fears of corporate education reform are justifiable. It is possible that the signs of corporatization are coincidental and not malicious, but they do exist. There is clearly a growing industry related to testing, and with only four big companies currently dominating the industry, they reap large profits. Those companies are Harcourt Educational Measurement, CTB McGraw-Hill, Riverside Publishing, the three of which are test publishers, and NCS Pearson, which is a test scoring company.⁸⁵ To illustrate how these companies make money, opponents of education reform talk about the extremely high cost of replacing public school textbooks when core curricula change or when new tests create new curricular needs. Even charter schools can be capitalized. There are for-profit charter schools, and there are non-profit charter schools that rely on services provided by outside, for-profit consultants. This is not true of every charter school, it is not rare for charters to generate profit.

When does education reform become a campaign issue?

There are several ways that education reform enters the dialogue during political campaigns. Frequently, a more populist Democrat will frame a campaign as a populist pro-public education candidate against a more conservative candidate with corporate ties. It is easy to make popular appeals based on opposition to the large corporations that monopolize a growing industry that takes advantage of public school children.

As leaders of their states, governors are those who are most likely to confront policy issues where state and federal law intersect. Therefore, gubernatorial candidates must spend time on their campaigns discussing how they would handle federal policies that mandate state adaptation and implementation. In recent years, beginning with President Bush's No Child Left

⁸⁵ "The Testing Industry's Big Four," *Frontline from PBS*, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/testing/companies.html>.

Behind and continuing with President Obama's Race to the Top and Common Core, federal education policy has had an increased presence in state elections around the country. Within that frame, there are certain times when education policy is more or less relevant. Sometimes a candidate will adopt education as their primary campaign issue, and will force the conversation to center around education policy. In other cases, deadlines for implementation of federal standards or gratuitous events such as testing scandals will force the political discussion towards education. In other circumstances, an economic downturn will bring education policy to the forefront as politicians and candidates seek ways to save their state money. It is important to note that candidates often have to be forced to engage in-depth with education policy, or to take assertive stances on aspects of education policy, especially the aforementioned methods of reform.

How do Democratic candidates talk about education reform?

In the current political climate, most Democratic candidates are reluctant to take very strong positions about education policy, and when they do so, it is generally because they have been pressed by other candidates or by media outlets. A Washington Post column from October, 2014 pointed out that very few candidates in the 2014 election cycle, either Republican or Democrat, championed education issues of any sort, or took strong positions in their platforms or on their websites.⁸⁶ Among those who did make their positions public, there are commonalities between the Democratic candidates as they attempted to balance the pressures within the party from education reformers and their opponents.

⁸⁶ Frederick M. Hess and Max Eden, "Candidates this November are studiously ignoring an issue that affects 50 million kids. We know, because we scoured their platforms," *The Washington Post*, October 22, 2014, accessed March 21, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/10/22/candidates-this-november-are-studiously-ignoring-an-issue-that-affects-50-million-kids-we-know-because-we-scoured-their-platforms/>.

Many Democrats use language similar to that of Texas gubernatorial candidate Wendy Davis, who said “I will continue fighting for less standardized testing and more teaching with the resources needed to do it.”⁸⁷ I will further explore the use of language used to discuss education policy during elections in my next chapter, which examines two case studies: the Democratic gubernatorial primaries in Rhode Island and New York.

Conclusion

The hallmark of the current education reform movement is the sharp divide between education reformers and their opponents. A lack of collaborative policymaking and the pervasiveness of a black-and-white perspective is part of American politics today, in more arenas than only education policy. But the divide over education policy is particular because the line between reformers and opponents of education reform does not correspond neatly with the divide between Republicans and Democrats. In most issue areas in American politics, there is a clear and consistent distinction between the position of Republicans and Democrats, and different candidates within the same party often have identical positions on the issues. With education policy today, Democrats are facing pressures to side with either education reformers or opponents of education reform, and whichever platform they adopt has important and significantly different implications for the way that education policy will be implemented and the way that American education systems will be changing in the near future. These pressures are primarily playing out within the context of electoral politics, which is where proponents and opponents of education reform have more equal influence over Democratic candidates and voters. Democrats rely on labor unions and teachers’ unions specifically for the assistance that they

⁸⁷ Bill Hethcock, “Texas governor candidates Abbott, Davis talk education, immigration,” *Dallas Business Journal*, October 24, 2014, accessed March 21, 2015, <http://www.bizjournals.com/dallas/blog/2014/10/texas-governor-candidates-abbott-davis-talk.html?page=all>.

provide in campaigns and elections, and teachers' unions are taking advantage of that power to try to influence the education policy stances of different Democratic candidates. In the two following case studies, I will explore teachers' unions' ability to influence electoral outcomes with consideration for education policy by examining their approach to endorsements.

Chapter 4: Case Studies

Introduction

For my case studies, I have chosen two Democratic gubernatorial primaries: New York and Rhode Island. Examining the relationship between Democrats and teachers' unions at the state level is proper for education reform because of the way that education policy is carried out in the United States. The American federalist system of government creates a continuous tension between power at the national and state level. Certain policy areas lend themselves naturally to more or less power at the state level. Whether education policy should be the purview of the national or state governments is subject to debate, and until 1976 there was no Department of Education, or Secretary of Education in the President's cabinet. The cabinet-level position remains a topic for debate, notably with Tea Party candidates within the Republican Party who advocate for abolition of the Department of Education. President Obama, whose Race to the Top initiative demonstrated his desire to centralize education standards, deferred to those who prefer state control by giving states the option to participate in Race to the Top. Although the significant funding attached made the program difficult to resist, several states did choose to abstain in favor of retaining more local control.

This emphasis on state control of education policy makes two governor's races appropriate case studies for examining how teachers' unions choose to endorse in Democratic primaries. Gubernatorial campaigns are the proper arena to assess teachers' unions' degree of influence on Democratic candidates over on education policy, because governors have a high degree of influence over their state's approach to education policy, and a governor has an opportunity to have personal relationships with union leaders that affect policy outcomes. In each case study, my aim is to see when the union endorsed, what reasons were cited or apparent in the

endorsement process, and what the electoral outcomes were for candidates with and without the endorsement of the state's major teachers' unions. An examination of how the winning candidate created his or her education policy agenda once in office is outside of the scope of this thesis, although I will briefly explore that area in my conclusion.

Rhode Island

Overview

In Rhode Island, the 2014 Democratic gubernatorial primary was a three-way open race in which two candidates split the progressive vote, allowing centrist Gina Raimondo to win the primary with only 42% of the vote. My hypothesis is that the progressive split occurred because of the education reform movement in the state, which caused teachers' unions to make their endorsements based on education policy priorities instead of general labor policy priorities. Although most labor unions supported progressive candidate Angel Taveras, the teachers' unions backed progressive candidate Clay Pell, boosting Pell from a long-shot candidate to a viable candidate and costing the early front-runner Taveras many votes.

Teachers' Unions in the State

Teachers' unions in Rhode Island are generally recognized to be strong and politically influential. Overall union membership is high in Rhode Island relative to membership around the country,⁸⁸ which increases the likelihood Rhode Islanders are receptive to teachers' unions'

⁸⁸ The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 68,000 Rhode Island private and public-sector workers, or 15.1 percent, were union members in 2014. An additional 4,000 or 0.7 percent were represented by unions without being members ("Economy at a Glance: Rhode Island," Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t05.htm>). In 2014, Rhode Island had the eighth highest union membership rates in the United States ("Union Membership in Rhode Island," RI Department of Labor and Training Labor Market Information, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://www.dlt.ri.gov/lmi/publications/union.htm>). According to federal statistics and membership numbers, more than 100,000 potential voters in Rhode Island have direct or

political messages. A study from 2012 about the strength of teachers' unions around the country that looked at measures such as resources and members, and their involvement in politics, ranked Rhode Island's teachers' unions as the fifth strongest in the United States.⁸⁹

Rhode Island teachers were explicitly granted the right to bargain collectively by the School Teachers' Arbitration Act in 1966. After passage of that state law, also called the Michaelson Act, the teachers' unions expanded their roles and acquired more political power as labor unions.⁹⁰ In the 1970s, the two state level unions, the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) and the National Education Association of Rhode Island (NEARI) considered merging, but decided to remain separate. Rhode Island follows the national pattern where the NEA affiliate is stronger and has a larger membership than the AFT affiliate. In the 2014 gubernatorial primary, it was NEARI's endorsement that was most sought after and given the most attention in the media.

NEARI was founded in 1845 and was primarily a professional organization up until 1966, when they became more involved in politics. NEARI currently has approximately 11,000 active members.⁹¹ To put that number in perspective, in 2014 there were 324,005 votes cast in the general gubernatorial election, and 128,095 votes cast in the primary gubernatorial election.⁹² Although the number of NEARI members may seem small in comparison with the total number of voters, the union's power comes from its high level of political organization, its political action fund for political contributions, and the position that the organization has in serving as an

indirect connections to labor unions (Steve Peoples, "Labor able to wield political influence far beyond its membership," *The Providence Journal*, June 9, 2008.).

⁸⁹ Ted Nesi, "Study: Rhode Island teachers unions 5th-strongest in the US," *Nesi's Notes* from *WPRI News*, December 11, 2012, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://wpri.com/blog/2012/12/11/study-rhode-island-teachers-unions-5th-strongest-in-the-us/>.

⁹⁰ "History of the Association," National Education Association of Rhode Island, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.neari.org/AboutNEARI/HistoryoftheAssociation/tabid/168/Default.aspx>.

⁹¹ Email to Molly Brand from Rhonda Muncey, NEARI Membership Coordinator. 2/11/15

⁹² "Elections and Voting," Rhode Island Secretary of State, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://sos.ri.gov/elections/>.

indication of the values of its endorsees. NEARI is very politically active, and is known for its power and influence in electoral politics. The union frequently endorses in gubernatorial races, having endorsed Lincoln Chafee in 2010, and Democratic gubernatorial candidate Myrth York in 2002.^{93,94} According to local news station WPRI, NEARI's ground game was "instrumental in electing Lincoln Chafee governor in 2010."⁹⁵

The AFT affiliate in Rhode Island is called the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP), and was founded in 1947. Today, RIFTHP has over 10,000 members, with a majority of their members being teachers or other school personnel. Because it does have a more diverse membership than a teachers-only union, RIFTHP's association with education policy, and its influence in that policy area, is weaker than that of NEARI. The RIFTHP is less active in electoral politics than NEARI, and was therefore less visible and less influential during the 2014 gubernatorial campaign. The RIFTHP endorsed Chafee in his 2010 gubernatorial campaign, but did not make an endorsement in the 2002 gubernatorial election.⁹⁶

Education reform in the state

In Rhode Island, education policy has recently been focused on standardized testing, and the use of such tests for graduation requirements and teacher evaluations.

New England Common Assessment Program

In 2008, Rhode Island adopted the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) of standardized tests as part of the nation-wide move towards collecting measurable data about

⁹³ Katherine Gregg, "Chafee gets second teachers union backing in race," *The Providence Journal*, August 26, 2010.

⁹⁴ Scott MacKay, "AFL-CIO likely to support York," *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, September 18, 2002.

⁹⁵ Ted Nesi, "NEARI teachers' union swings support behind Clay Pell," *WPRI*, March 20, 2014, accessed December 7, 2014, <http://blogs.wpri.com/2014/03/20/neari-teachers-union-swings-support-behind-clay-pell/>.

⁹⁶ Katherine Gregg, "Major union backs Chafee," *The Providence Journal*, July 22, 2010.

student and school performance. NECAP was adopted jointly with New Hampshire and Vermont, but Rhode Island was alone in tying performance on the tests to graduation requirements. This requirement was scheduled to go into effect for the graduating class of 2014.⁹⁷ The proposal attracted significant opposition because of concerns that it would keep students from graduating, and also because of the way that high-stakes testing has been tied to teacher evaluations.⁹⁸

In an effort to minimize effects on high school graduation rates, the Rhode Island legislature passed a bill in 2014 instating a three-year moratorium on using the NECAP as a graduation requirement. State Education Commissioner Deborah Gist opposed the bill to postpone testing, and likewise, Governor Chafee did not support the moratorium on the NECAP.⁹⁹ Chafee did not, however, strongly oppose the legislation, and he did not veto the bill when it garnered enough votes to become law without his signature in July 2014.¹⁰⁰

Opponents of the high-stakes testing included the ACLU and the Rhode Island teachers' unions. The ACLU had testified to the Rhode Island legislature that relying on standardized tests for graduation requirements "has a significant adverse impact on vulnerable student populations."¹⁰¹

In March, 2014, NEARI leaders voted unanimously to oppose the use of NECAP as a high school graduation requirement.¹⁰² NEARI President Larry Purtil said that the use of ten alternative tests and a waiver system indicated that NECAP was not serving any purpose as a

⁹⁷ Linda Borg, "A look back at the first NECAP graduating class in Rhode Island," *The Providence Journal*, June 22, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.providencejournal.com/news/education/20140622-a-look-back-at-the-first-necap-graduating-class-in-rhode-island.ece>.

⁹⁸ Linda Borg, "NECAP graduation requirement pushed to 2017 as R.I. Gov. Chafee lets bill become law on its own," *The Providence Journal*, July 2, 2014, <http://www.providencejournal.com/article/20140702/News/307029935>.

⁹⁹ Harrison, Elisabeth, "Governor Declines to Veto High Stakes Testing Moratorium," *RINPR*, July 2, 2014, accessed December 9, 2014, <http://ripr.org/post/governor-declines-veto-high-stakes-testing-moratorium>.

¹⁰⁰ Erika Niedowski, "NECAP moratorium becomes law in Rhode Island," *Associated Press*, July 1, 2014, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://wpri.com/2014/07/01/necap-moratorium-becomes-law-in-rhode-island/>.

¹⁰¹ "Issues: High Stakes Testing," ACLU, last modified March 3, 2015, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://riaclu.org/issues/issue/high-stakes-testing/>.

¹⁰² Linda Borg, "Union leaders vote 'nay' on NECAP," *The Providence Journal*, March 26, 2014.

graduation requirement, and was imposing a cost on teaching.¹⁰³ The RIFTHP and the NEARI put out a joint press release on April 30, 2013 stating that “72% of teachers believe the NECAP test should not be a requirement for graduation from high school.”¹⁰⁴

Teacher Evaluations

In general, teachers’ unions have strongly opposed teacher evaluations that rely heavily on standardized tests. In Rhode Island, the issue has not been so contentious or very obviously present in the media because the teachers’ unions’ influence has resulted in more teacher-friendly evaluation procedures such as those implemented in 2012. In that year, Rhode Island implemented a new system of teacher evaluations that has been commended for being more comprehensive than most others around the country, which tend to be narrowly based on standardized tests.¹⁰⁵ Instead, in Rhode Island the more pressing concerns during the 2014 election were about the frequency of teacher evaluations. Unions and many others who are involved in education, including administrators, felt that with limited resources, schools should cut down on the amount of evaluations for teachers who have demonstrated their abilities successfully. Candidate Clay Pell came out against annual evaluations for teachers deemed “effective” and “highly effective,” and both Raimondo and Taveras followed suit to recommend less frequent evaluations.¹⁰⁶ When the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a bill that did

¹⁰³ Dan McGowan, "Powerful teachers' union wants to end NECAP," *WPRI News*, March 24, 2014, <http://wpri.com/2014/03/24/powerful-teachers-union-wants-to-end-necap/>.

¹⁰⁴ "RI Teachers Issue Stinging Indictment of Commissioner Gist," joint press release by NEARI and RIFTHP, April 30, 2013, http://www.rifthp.org/files/uploads/PressRel_Apr13.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ Linda Borg, "RI wins high marks for use of teacher evaluations," *Providence Journal*, November 3, 2013, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.providencejournal.com/article/20131103/News/311039977>.

¹⁰⁶ Katherine Gregg, "Teachers federation defers endorsement," *The Providence Journal*, July 7, 2014.

reduce the burden of evaluations for effective and highly effective teachers, the RIFTHP applauded the legislature.¹⁰⁷

The Campaign

The election for the Rhode Island Democratic gubernatorial primary took place on September 9, 2014. Of four declared candidates, there were three viable contenders, presented in alphabetical order: Clay Pell, former Deputy Assistant Secretary in the United States Department of Education, and first-time political candidate; Gina Raimondo, General Treasurer of Rhode Island; and Angel Taveras, Mayor of Providence.

Although all three were Democrats, they ranged along the ideological scale from centrist to progressive. Raimondo was solidly centrist, having alienated public union members and others more to the left within the Party with her work to reform public pensions in the state. Both Taveras and Pell were progressives, but Pell became defined as the true progressive in the race because Taveras favored certain education reform policies that were rejected by the teachers' unions.

On Election Day, Rhode Island's Democrats voted in nearly even numbers for either a centrist or a progressive candidate, and therefore the existence of two progressive candidates allowed Raimondo to win. Although she did not carry a majority of the votes, her 42.2 percent share of the vote was significantly higher than that of either Taveras (29.2 percent) or Pell (26.9 percent).¹⁰⁸ Significantly more Rhode Islanders voted for a progressive Democrat – in fact, a

¹⁰⁷ "RIFTHP Thanks General Assembly for Passing Teacher Evaluation Bill," Press Release by RIFTHP, July 10, 2014, <http://www.rifthp.org/TeacherEvalBill>.

¹⁰⁸ "Rhode Island Primary Election Results," *The New York Times*, September 9, 2014, <http://elections.nytimes.com/2014/results/primaries/rhode-island>.

majority of Rhode Islanders, or 56.1 percent, voted for a progressive – but because they split their vote between two candidates, centrist Raimondo was able to win.

At the beginning of the race, Pell had very little chance of winning, and it is likely that NEARI's endorsement helped him procure a greater share of the vote than he would have won without it. As will be shown below, the teachers' union was a determining factor in the outcome of the gubernatorial election, and had the union chosen to endorse Taveras, then he likely would have won the entire race. NEARI's endorsement of Pell cost Taveras much-needed momentum and allowed labor's least favorite candidate to win.

The Candidates

Gina Raimondo

Gina Raimondo, a centrist Democrat, came into the race with strong name recognition from her term as the state's General Treasurer, in particular because of her efforts to reform public pensions. As Treasurer, she championed pension reform of the state's public retirement funds to avoid likely insolvency in 2011.¹⁰⁹ Several other parts of Raimondo's political biography alarmed progressive Democrats. She came from a business background, and had founded Point Judith Capital, the first venture capital firm in Rhode Island. And as treasurer, Raimondo rejected a tax hike on the wealthy in 2011.

Raimondo announced her candidacy in January, 2014, and centered her campaign around improving the economy, education, and infrastructure in the state. Despite her best efforts at messaging, Raimondo was defined by her efforts to reform pensions, and as a result, she was

¹⁰⁹ Raimondo supported and promoted legislation that raised the retirement age from 62 to 67, and it was she who negotiated a settlement with the state's public sector unions after the unions sued to block the changes. Ultimately, that settlement collapsed because of opposition from the police union, and as of early 2015, pension reform had not been implemented. (Allysia Finley, "The Trial of a Democratic Pension Reformer," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 4, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/allysia-finley-the-trial-of-a-democratic-pension-reformer-1409872964>.)

opposed by many progressive Rhode Islanders. Although Raimondo's being the only woman in the race may have given her an edge with female voters, surveys indicated that the labor unions with the most female members, including teachers' unions and public employee unions, did not trust her.¹¹⁰

Labor, as a whole, did not oppose Raimondo or pension reform, and there was a distinct split between public and private sector unions. According to a survey, private sector union members approved the pension reforms two-to-one. Rhode Islanders overall supported pension reforms by an 18-point margin.¹¹¹ Raimondo was actually endorsed by over twenty private sector unions, including unions such as Sheet Metal Workers Local 17 and Sprinkler Fitters Local 669.¹¹² But those endorsements came from unions unaffected by the pension reforms she had championed, and public sectors remained staunchly opposed to her candidacy.

Angel Taveras

Taveras was one of the two progressive Democrats in the race, and would have become the first Latino governor of Rhode Island. Taveras was the son of a Dominican immigrant, and on the campaign trail spoke about how his mother's hard work had provided many opportunities for him. At the time of the campaign, he was mayor of Providence, and had the support of most local labor groups. Ideologically, Taveras fell between Pell and Raimondo.

Taveras was the first to enter the race for Rhode Island governor, and was an early favorite after he announced in October, 2013. A November poll showed that economic issues led among voters' concerns, which boded well for Taveras, who had emphasized jobs, education,

¹¹⁰ Mackay, Scott, "Down the stretch in RI Democratic governor campaign," *RI NPR*, August 27, 2014, accessed December 7, 2014, <http://ripr.org/post/down-stretch-ri-democratic-governor-campaign>.

¹¹¹ Finley, "The Trial of a Democratic Pension Reformer."

¹¹² "Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 618, Endorses Gina Raimondo for Governor," Gina Raimondo for Governor, last modified Thursday October 23, 2014, <http://www.ginaraimondo.com/press-releases/amalgamated-transit-union-local-618-endorses-gina-raimondo-governor>.

and cooperation in state government when he announced.¹¹³ Polls continued to show Taveras leading among the Democratic candidates until the summer of 2014.¹¹⁴ He was significantly underfunded, however, relative to the other two candidates. As Pell gained ground in the race, Taveras seemed to dedicate resources away from attacking Raimondo and towards attacks on Pell. Because progressives were unlikely to transfer their support to Raimondo, Taveras decided to spend his resources on dissuading progressives from giving their votes to Pell.¹¹⁵

Although Taveras was endorsed by several unions, including the Rhode Island branch of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), he failed to secure endorsements from either of the two state teachers' unions. NEARI's explanation for choosing Pell over Taveras was that Taveras had supported education policies that NEARI did not support.¹¹⁶ The opportunity for the RITHP endorsement, however, was on a different footing. In 2014, the Providence Teachers Union was negotiating new terms for their contract with the City of Providence. Because the PTU is affiliated with the RITHP, Taveras' involvement with the contract negotiation disqualified him from receiving their endorsement. Initially, it appeared that the RITHP would abstain from endorsing, and would remain neutral, but when they ultimately chose to endorse Pell, it was also viewed as an endorsement against Taveras.

Clay Pell

Clay Pell was a newcomer to Rhode Island politics, having never run for elected office. Although he himself had not been very involved in Rhode Island, his family was from the state, and Pell was the grandson of U.S. Senator Claiborne Pell, who represented Rhode Island in the

¹¹³ Randal Edgar, "Taveras launches campaign," *The Providence Journal*, October 29, 2013.

¹¹⁴ "Taveras leads in gubernatorial poll," *U-Wire*, November 21, 2013.

¹¹⁵ Edward Fitzpatrick, "Some theories why Taveras is taking aim at Pell," *The Providence Journal*, August 10, 2014.

¹¹⁶ Ted Nesi, "NEARI teachers' union swings support behind Clay Pell," *WPRI*, March 20, 2014, accessed December 7, 2014, <http://blogs.wpri.com/2014/03/20/neari-teachers-union-swings-support-behind-clay-pell/>.

1980s and 90s. Pell grew up in Arizona, and on the campaign trail he talked a great deal about the summers that he spent with his family in Newport, Rhode Island. Pell's efforts to increase his name recognition were helped by his marriage to Olympic figure skater Michelle Kwan.

Pell had inherited wealth from his family, and did not have a clearly defined career. His longest-standing commitment was as a Lieutenant in the U.S. Coast Guard, and immediately prior to running for governor, Pell briefly held a position as an assistant deputy secretary in the US Department of Education. Pell's resume came under scrutiny during the campaign, and Taveras criticized him for having held nine jobs over eight years. Pell's claim that he had made Rhode Island his home after college was complicated by the attacks on his resume, since many of the jobs he held were not located in Rhode Island.¹¹⁷

Ideologically, Pell was the most progressive candidate. On the issues that divided the three candidates, Pell was mostly closely aligned with Taveras, but where Pell and Taveras diverged, Taveras' positions were more pragmatic and therefore more centrist than Pell's positions.

Pell announced his campaign in January, 2014, and was considered a long-shot candidate, with his primary asset being his private wealth. Pell ended up investing more than \$3 million of his own fortune into his campaign. He only raised a relatively small amount from donors, finishing with \$.37 million spent, in contrast with the \$2.3 million spent by Taveras, and \$4.9 million spent by Raimondo.¹¹⁸

When he was endorsed by NEARI in March, 2014, many newspaper articles gave Pell credit for being more successful than expected, and predicted that NEARI's campaign support

¹¹⁷ Ted Nesi, "Clay Pell's resume comes under closer scrutiny," *WPRI News*, August 12, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://wpri.com/2014/08/12/clay-pells-resume-comes-under-closer-scrutiny/>.

¹¹⁸ Ted Nesi, "Clay Pell campaign spent \$111 for every vote he got," *WPRI News*, September 10, 2014, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://wpri.com/2014/09/10/clay-pell-campaign-spent-111-for-every-vote-he-got/>.

would go a long way in giving the candidate exposure and assistance. Former Rhode Island State Representative John Loughlin said that “the power of the NEA behind Pell [meant] that he [would] have a solid ground game – a very labor intensive effort of making sure your previously identified voters get to the poll.”¹¹⁹ In August, the RIFTHP decided to endorse Pell, and the media called it “a blow” to Taveras’ campaign.¹²⁰ Articles predicted that if Taveras were to lose, it would be because some of state’s unions decided to break rank and endorse Pell, especially the powerful teachers’ unions.¹²¹

Why did the two unions endorse?

The primary difference between the candidates was the attention and energy that they dedicated to education issues, particularly education reform. Although all three candidates supported the moratorium on using NECAP tests as a graduation requirement, Pell took the lead on the issue, publicizing a letter to Governor Chafee urging him to sign the moratorium bill. In his letter, Pell also urged Chafee to support legislation that would reduce the frequency of evaluations for “effective” and “highly effective” teachers. Raimondo and Taveras provided their positions on these policies only after Pell pressed the issue.¹²² Teacher evaluations were not decisively influential as a policy area, since the candidates had similar positions. Rather, the attention and priority given to this aspect of education policy influenced how the unions viewed the candidates.

¹¹⁹ Arielle Confino, “RI Primary Predictions: Political Experts Weigh In,” *GoLocalProv*, August 26, 2014, accessed December 7, 2014, <http://www.golocalprov.com/news/ri-primary-predictions-political-experts-weigh-in>.

¹²⁰ Scott Mackay, “RI Federation of Teachers Endorses Pell; Blow to Taveras,” *RINPR*, August 28, 2014, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://ripr.org/post/ri-federation-teachers-endorses-pell-blow-taveras>.

¹²¹ Arielle Confino, “Public Employee Unions May Decide the 2014 Democratic Primary,” *GoLocalProv*, August 11, 2014, accessed December 7, 2014, <http://www.golocalprov.com/news/public-employee-unions-may-decide-the-2014-democratic-primary>.

¹²² Katherine Gregg, “Candidates for governor weigh in on NECAP moratorium, teacher evaluations,” *The Providence Journal*, June 25, 2014, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.providencejournal.com/breaking-news/content/20140625-candidates-for-r.i.-governor-weigh-in-on-necap-moratorium-teacher-evaluations.ece>.

Pell's boldness with education policy won him NEARI's endorsement, and it was because of their endorsement that the RIFTHP decided to back Pell as well. NEARI made its endorsement based primarily on one education reform policy: how and when to use the NECAP standardized tests. Pell took a firm stance against standardized testing, and said that he would definitely not support their use as a graduation requirement. Taveras declined to publicly oppose the tests, and took milder stances on the use of NECAP as a graduation requirement, and for that he was punished by the NEARI.

The RIFTHP initially declined to endorse any candidates for governor, citing a failure of its executive council to arrive at consensus in choosing a candidate. The RIFTHP did however choose to endorse several other candidates for different positions, including for lieutenant governor and for secretary of state. The priorities that the union cited in their explanation their endorsement decisions included the following: preserving collective bargaining rights, preserving funding for public schools from early childhood to higher education, and choosing candidates who support public employees.¹²³

When the RIFTHP finally chose to endorse Pell for governor, the choice was not surprising, although the decision to endorse at all may have been a surprise. It would have been shocking if either of the other two candidates had won their endorsement. The union almost certainly would not have endorsed Raimondo because of her pension reforms, and Taveras was also disqualified because of his involvement in negotiations with the Providence Teachers Union. In regards to the RIFTHP's decision to endorse a candidate after initially declining to do so; unions and other politically active organizations face increasing pressure to make endorsements as Election Day nears, as I explained in my chapter about teachers' unions and endorsement. In

¹²³ Katherine Gregg, "Teachers federation defers endorsement," *The Providence Journal*, July 7, 2014.

this case, the RIFTHP felt pressure to endorse, and they chose to join with their peer teachers' union and endorse Pell.

When NEARI endorsed Pell, the newspapers published articles predicting that Pell would perform better than anticipated now that he had such major support behind his campaign. These comments referenced the role that NEARI had played in previous campaigns, and said that they had been crucial to Governor Chafee's victory previously. After the election, the vice president of the Brookings Institution, Darrell West, offered this analysis of the campaign: "It was a classic divide and conquer strategy in the Democratic gubernatorial race. The candidate disliked by labor won by having two opponents split the progressive vote."¹²⁴ The leader of SEIU Local 580, which supported Taveras offered a more targeted critique, calling Pell a spoiler, and blaming him for Raimondo's victory.¹²⁵ Labor leaders and others agreed that Pell been boosted by the teachers' unions, and that his campaign's unanticipated success was detrimental to Taveras' bid for governor.

Conclusion

In this case study, teachers' unions affected the outcome of the election with their endorsements: their support for Clay Pell divided progressive voters and allowed Gina Raimondo to win the governor's seat. Teachers' unions' actions demonstrated their power and influence in elections, but the outcomes were not beneficial to teachers' unions or their education policy preferences. First, most simply, by deciding to back Pell the teachers' unions cost Angel Taveras the opportunity to win the election. Taveras and Raimondo were the two leaders in the primary

¹²⁴ Arielle Confino, "Where Do RI Labor Unions Go From Here?" *GoLocalProv*, September 13, 2014, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.golocalprov.com/news/where-do-ri-labor-unions-go-from-here3>.

¹²⁵ Erika Neidowski, "Raimondo begins outreach to labor union leaders," *Associated Press*, September 10, 2014, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/sep/10/gubernatorial-nominees-pivot-to-november-election/?page=all>.

race, but Taveras had the most to lose from Pell's candidacy, and from his success. Raimondo was sufficiently well-funded and successful in generating momentum within her separate base of more centrist Democrats, whereas Taveras would have needed the endorsements of the teachers' unions, and specifically NEARI, in order to build up his campaign funds and momentum in the media. By choosing not to endorse Taveras, the teachers' unions divided progressive voters and allowed Raimondo to win. The surprising part about their decision is that because Pell was a long-shot candidate from the outset, teachers' unions ought to have known that supporting his candidacy would not be enough to allow him to win, that it would instead increase Raimondo's chances. Secondly, by supporting Pell, the teachers' unions divided the two progressive candidates and caused them to focus on each other. The division of Rhode Island's progressive candidates meant that their attention was focused away from Gina Raimondo, and as a result she was able to avoid engaging with the issues that progressives cared about the most. This is certainly true for education issues. Without electoral unity between teachers' unions and other progressives in Rhode Island, there was no concerted effort to pressure Raimondo into taking union-friendly positions on education policy. Therefore, the unions lost their opportunity to exert any lasting influence on education policy via their electoral strength.

This case study is also revealing about the state of the Democratic Party in Rhode Island. As a primarily single-party state, it is to be expected that the Democratic Party within Rhode Island would cover a wider range of ideologies and policy positions than if the Party faced significant pressure to define itself in opposition to a strong Republican Party. The way that the Democrats divided their votes nearly evenly between progressive and centrist candidates in the gubernatorial election indicates that the party is presently less unified and is susceptible to being taken in either of those two ideological directions. With Raimondo's victory in the final election,

it seems likely that if she enjoys a successful term, the Rhode Island Democratic Party will move more towards the center. This likely outcome was made possible by the role that education policy played in the Democratic primary. Progressives failed to recognize the importance of education policy and the teachers' unions and failed to predict the outcome of prioritizing that specific policy area over a more broad progressive victory. The Democratic candidate did win in the final election against the Republican candidate, but it was not certain that Democrats would win after their primary. If progressive Democrats had remained staunchly opposed to Raimondo's centrist platform, and had refused to vote for her in the general election, then the Democratic Party would have lost the governor's seat. It seems that Democrats risked the gubernatorial election by allowing education policy to play a decisive role in the primary.

New York

Overview

In New York State, incumbent governor Andrew Cuomo faced an unexpectedly strong challenge in the Democratic primary election. Challenger Zephyr Teachout garnered far too few votes to win, but her 35% of the vote was significantly higher than the 20% expected by her campaign, and her success was embarrassing for Cuomo, who had political aspirations beyond the governorship.

Although Cuomo was known as a liberal Democrat, the more progressive Teachout painted him as an economic conservative and an education reformer who had no regard for New York's teachers. In their campaigns, the two candidates had clear differences on education policy, with Cuomo supporting charter schools, the Common Core State Standards, and teacher evaluations tied to standardized testing. Teachout spoke out against those reforms.

Cuomo had not been endorsed by the powerful and influential New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) in his first campaign in 2010, and it was unsurprising that he failed to get their endorsement in 2014. But his positions on education policy and his poor relationship with the NYSUT cost Cuomo the endorsement of the New York AFL-CIO, which had previously supported him. This political coup allowed Teachout's campaign to gain the momentum that allowed her to do well.

NEA and AFT in the State

New York is very important in the history of American teachers' unions, because New York City was the site of the 1962 strike that established teachers' ability to negotiate powerfully through organized efforts.

Although at the national level and in nearly every state, the NEA and the AFT remain separate organizations, in New York the unions have been merged since 2006. At the national level, the idea of merging has been rejected several times, most recently in 1998. Delegates who voted against the merger cited irreconcilable cultural and traditional differences between the two unions.¹²⁶

New York was distinct from national-level teachers' union politics prior to the 2006 merger in that the state's NEA affiliate was significantly smaller than the AFT affiliate, called the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). Nationally, the NEA has many more members than the AFT, and correspondingly more money and political influence. In New York, at the time of the merger, members of the NEA numbered only about 35,000, while NYSUT had about 525,000 members.¹²⁷ Although some in the NEA opposed merging with the NYSUT because it

¹²⁶ Richard Cooper, "Teachers Reject Merger of Unions," *Buffalo News*, July 6, 1998.

¹²⁷ "Around the State," *Buffalo News*, April 30, 2006.

was affiliated with the AFL-CIO, those reservations were overcome in the interest of further strengthening the power of the NYSUT, which was already one of the most powerful lobbying forces in the state.

The merger has not completely erased lines between the NEA and the AFT state-level affiliates, and when it comes to political endorsements, the composite NYSUT has at times refrained from making endorsements in order to allow its members to make individual, potentially diverging, endorsements.

Endorsement history

Prior to its merger with the NEA in 2006, the NYSUT had a fairly regular tradition of endorsing gubernatorial candidates. The NYSUT endorsed Mario Cuomo in his first campaign for governor in 1992, as well as in his three subsequent re-election campaigns. Republican George Pataki defeated Cuomo in 1994, and served for three consecutive terms until 2006. In the 2002 race, the NYSUT's decision to remain neutral allowed member organizations to make their own endorsement choices. The United Federation of Teachers, which is the AFT affiliate for New York City, chose to endorse Pataki. In that same race, the NEA, which was at the time a separate union, endorsed Democratic candidate Carl McCall. In 2006, the newly-merged NYSUT endorsed Eliot Spitzer for governor, even though, in that same year, Spitzer investigated the NYSUT's retirement investment practices while serving as the New York Attorney General.¹²⁸ In 2010, the NYSUT specifically declined to endorse Cuomo, citing concerns about his proposed property tax cap and its effect on teachers.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Mark Johnson, "NYSUT settles Spitzer probe of retirement funds," *Buffalo News*, June 14, 2006.

¹²⁹ Jerry Zremski and Tom Precious, "Candidates agree turnout will be key," *McClathy-Tribune Regional News*, October 31, 2010.

Education reform in the state

In New York State, education policy has been focused on three elements in the last few years: teacher evaluations, charter schools, and the Common Core.

Teacher evaluations

In 2010, Governor David Paterson (Democrat) signed a teacher evaluation law creating the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR). The law was supported by then-New York City Mayor Bloomberg (Republican). The 2010 law created an outline for teacher evaluation systems that would be based on test scores and other measures, and allowed individual school districts to negotiate the details with their teachers' unions.¹³⁰ The APPR continued to be a focus as Andrew Cuomo took office and emphasized teacher evaluations in connection with New York's participation in President Obama's Race to the Top initiative. Education activists noted Cuomo's support for closely tying teacher evaluations to standardized tests, specifically those tests that were to be implemented as part of the Common Core State Standards program.

In 2012, Cuomo proposed a budget that required school districts to implement teacher evaluation systems in order to qualify for increased school funding. Although nearly all of the state's more than 600 school districts negotiated evaluation systems within the year, in New York City the process stalled because of disagreements about the roles of appeals processes for teachers and of student test scores in teacher evaluations. In response to the delays, Cuomo announced his intention to implement an evaluation system by force if the teachers' union and the New York City government failed to reach an agreement. The NYSUT commented on

¹³⁰ Al Baker, "Governor Issues Ultimatum in Teacher-Evaluation Fight," *New York Times*, January 30, 2013.

Cuomo's evident frustration, saying that tying teacher evaluations to state education aid was the "wrong approach."¹³¹

Charter Schools

Charter schools are contentious in New York as they are across the country. In 2014, when several charter schools faced difficulty getting physical space for their schools in New York City, Cuomo and his staff worked with Republican legislators in the state Senate – and against progressive Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio – to create legislative protections for charters in the city. Although the NYSUT spent \$2.5 million in campaigning against the pro-charter legislation, the result of Cuomo's efforts was a deal that gave New York City charter schools some of the most sweeping protections in the country.^{132 133}

Common Core State Standards

Although New York adopted Common Core State Standards in 2010, implementation was very contentious because of the emphasis on standardized tests, and as of early 2015 standards had not yet been fully implemented. In June 2014, a poll found that a majority of upstate New Yorkers thought that the rollout of the state's Common Core standards had been rushed, and many parents opted to have their children not take the 2014 exams.¹³⁴ Governor Cuomo had consistently supported the Common Core, but in January 2014 he succumbed to pressure from parents and educators and called for a public examination of the implementation

¹³¹ Thomas Kaplan and Kate Taylor, "Invoking King, Cuomo and Bloomberg Stoke Fight on Teacher Review Impasse," *The New York Times*, January 16, 2012.

¹³² Pat Bailey, "Teachers snub gov again," *New York Post*, August 15, 2014.

¹³³ Javier Hernandez and Susanne Craig, "Cuomo Played Pivotal Role in Charter School Push," *New York Times*, April 3, 2014.

¹³⁴ "Upstate New Yorkers: Common Core rollout rushed," *Associated Press Newswire*, June 15, 2014.

process, which he called “flawed.”¹³⁵ Detractors of the Common Core include Zephyr Teachout, who had written that although the standards were theoretically appealing, in practice they required a dependence on standardized testing that limited classroom creativity and improperly measured student learning and educators’ ability to teach.¹³⁶

The candidates

Andrew Cuomo

Andrew Cuomo was the incumbent governor in 2014. He was first elected in 2010, and was the son of three-term governor, Mario Cuomo. Cuomo was a popular governor during his first term, with average favorability ratings well above 60 percent.¹³⁷ His reputation as a liberal Democrat was repeatedly challenged during his 2014 re-election campaign when Cuomo faced a more progressive opponent during the Democratic primary.

In terms of education policy, Cuomo was perceived as being firmly in the camp of education reformers.¹³⁸ Education activists said that Cuomo generally supported corporate school reform, and Cuomo had angered progressives by promoting charter schools.^{139, 140} Cuomo’s relationship with the NYSUT was marred by fights over teacher evaluations, the Common Core

¹³⁵ Denise Jewell Gee, “Cuomo says implementation of Common Core changes was ‘flawed,’” *The Buffalo News*, January 22, 2014, accessed January 30, 2015, <http://www.buffalonews.com/city-region/schools/cuomo-says-implementation-of-common-core-changes-was-flawed-20140122>.

¹³⁶ Zephyr Teachout, “View: Zephyr Teachout on Common Core,” *The Journal News*, July 17, 2014, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.lohud.com/story/opinion/contributors/2014/07/17/view-zephyr-teachout-common-core/12811213/>.

¹³⁷ Brendan Cheney, “Capital Data : Tracking Cuomo and de Blasio in the polls,” *Capital New York*, February 19, 2015, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/city-hall/2015/02/8559831/capital-data-tracking-cuomo-and-de-blasio-polls>.

¹³⁸ Conor P. Williams, “In 2016, Democrats Have Good Reason to Run Against Obama’s Education Record,” *New Republic*, June 3, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117989/hillary-clintons-education-policy-other-implications-2016>.

¹³⁹ Valerie Strauss, “New York Gov. Cuomo may face primary challenge from progressive Democrat,” *The Washington Post*, June 12, 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Karen Matthews, “Law professor Teachout aims to challenge Cuomo,” *Associated Press*, June 20, 2014.

standards, and his support for charter schools.¹⁴¹ The NYSUT did not endorse Cuomo in his 2010 campaign against Republican Carl Paladino.

Zephyr Teachout

Zephyr Teachout, a law professor at Fordham University, had never run for office and had lived in New York for only five years before deciding to run for governor. She was nearly unknown in New York politics, and from the start of her campaign knew that her chances of winning were slim. Nevertheless, she became more than a fringe candidate, and she and her running mate, Tim Wu, presented the strongest challenge to an incumbent governor since New York implemented gubernatorial primaries in 1970.¹⁴²

The opposition movement that served as a catalyst for Teachout's candidacy had roots in opposition to Cuomo's education policies, as well as anger over Cuomo's tax policies that included tax cuts for big banks.^{143, 144} Teachout was recruited to run for governor by the Working Families Party (WFP), a self-styled Democratic socialist party that is one of the state's most influential coalitions of liberals and labor unions. Despite their early encouragement for Teachout, ultimately the WFP received enough promises and concessions from Cuomo that they endorsed his re-election campaign.¹⁴⁵

Teachout launched her campaign at the beginning of June, and, as befitted her role as the underdog, began with an aggressive tone. She criticized Cuomo for failing to address New York's "equality crisis," for cutting corporate taxes, and accused the governor of "looting" the

¹⁴¹ "NY teacher union won't endorse in governor's race," *Associated Press*, August 14, 2014, http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2014/08/ny_teacher_union_wont_endorse_in_governors_race.html.

¹⁴² Thomas Kaplan, "Cuomo Defeats a Liberal Rival in the Primary," *New York Times*, September 10, 2014.

¹⁴³ Conor P. Williams, "In 2016, Democrats Have Good Reason to Run Against Obama's Education Record."

¹⁴⁴ Tom Precious, "Teachout's attacks forced governor to run expensive ad campaign," *Buffalo News*, September 10, 2014.

¹⁴⁵ ¹⁴⁵ Thomas Kaplan, "Cuomo Defeats a Liberal Rival in the Primary," *New York Times*, September 10, 2014.

public school system to serve wealthy interests.¹⁴⁶ Although Teachout ran a campaign with general appeal to New York's liberal Democrats, she focused special attention on those who were dissatisfied by Cuomo, especially the teachers and parents who wanted more investment in public education.

In her campaign, Teachout advocated increasing funding for public schools, and eliminating high-stakes testing, and raising the minimum wage.¹⁴⁷ Teachout opposed implementation of the Common Core, citing concerns that the standards came "from private and out of state interests," instead of from New York teachers and parents.¹⁴⁸ Anti-corruption was central to Teachout's campaign, and her platform focused on a public campaign financing system modeled on a successful system in New York City.¹⁴⁹

The Campaign

Going into his reelection campaign, Cuomo expected to win, and hoped to win by a very large margin to enhance his political career. Yet soon after his May, 2014 campaign announcement, Cuomo faced uncertainty when the influential Working Families Party (WFP), a party of liberal activists and labor unions, seemed likely to endorse his opponent. The WFP was dissatisfied with Cuomo primarily because of his economic policies, which included support for corporate tax cuts and reduced pension benefits for newly hired state employees.¹⁵⁰ At their

¹⁴⁶ Glenn Blain, "Upstart candidate Zephyr Teachout launches campaign with attacks on Gov. Cuomo," *Daily News*, June 16, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/dailypolitics/upstart-candidate-zephyr-teachout-launches-campaign-attacks-gov-cuomo-blog-entry-1.1831750>.

¹⁴⁷ Ginia Bellafante, "Tilting at Corruption," *The New York Times*, August 3, 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Tom Wroblewski, "In Staten Island visit, Cuomo challenger Zephyr Teachout lays out education, storm recovery plans," *SI Live*, July 16, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, http://www.silive.com/news/index.ssf/2014/07/in_staten_island_visit_cuomo_c.html.

¹⁴⁹ "The Governor's Primary in New York," *Legal Monitor Worldwide*, August 27, 2014.

¹⁵⁰ Jessey McKinley, "Cuomo Secures Support of Working Families Party," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/01/nyregion/cuomo-secures-support-of-working-families-party.html>.

convention in June, members of the WFP loudly expressed anger at Cuomo and his failure to support progressive policies in New York. Yet Cuomo was able to retain the support of the party as a whole by having New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio speak in his favor, and by making several concessions to WFP demands. WFP members voted to endorse Cuomo after he agreed to support a higher minimum wage in the state and an even higher one in cities, and to support passing a public financing election law for the state.¹⁵¹

The WFP endorsement prevented Teachout from gaining momentum that could have potentially unseated Cuomo. Nevertheless, Teachout decided to continue her bid for the governor's seat after failing to secure the WFP endorsement. Cuomo refused to acknowledge Teachout as a serious opponent, and would not refer to her by name. He declined to debate with Teachout during the primary, so instead, Teachout debated Republican Rob Astorino on September 4th. In the debate, Teachout said New York should invest more in education.

Education in the campaign

Although the issue of education reform was an important underlying issue in the race that impacted endorsements and political alignments within the Democratic Party, it was not one of the explicit leading issues. During the campaign, Andrew Cuomo was able to avoid being trapped into providing an easily digestible sound bite statement about his position on Common Core in New York, according to Richard Brodsky, a senior fellow at New York City think tank Demos.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Harold Meyerson, "The Working Families Party brings Andrew Cuomo back into the fold," *The Washington Post*, June 6, 2014.

¹⁵² Andrew Ujifusa, "N.Y. Primary Results Hint at Depth of Common-Core Discontent," *Education Week*, September 17, 2014.

The most explicitly discussed education issues in the campaign were those surrounding Common Core, the adoption of which implied a strong emphasis on standardized testing.¹⁵³ Cuomo supported Common Core, while Teachout opposed it. Teachout was also found to support teacher tenure, while Cuomo was noncommittal about the issue.¹⁵⁴

Union endorsements

In mid-August, the big labor unions in the state started releasing statements about their endorsement decisions. An article by the New York Post reported that unions are typically considered automatic supporters for incumbent New York Democrats, and set the stage for even non-endorsements of Cuomo to send a very clear message.¹⁵⁵ The NYSUT, which has about 600,000 members, said in mid-August that it would not endorse in the gubernatorial primary as long as Zephyr Teachout remained on the ballot, indicating that although it did not want to get behind Teachout's candidacy, the union did not want to hurt her campaign, or help Cuomo.¹⁵⁶ In its reporting of the non-endorsement, a Rochester newspaper cited the tension between Cuomo and the NYSUT over teacher evaluations and Cuomo's embrace of the Common Core.¹⁵⁷ The Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), another public sector union, said it would be

¹⁵³ In July and August, two lawsuits were filed challenging teacher tenure in New York State. The lawsuits, which alleged that tenure laws are antithetical to students' ability to receive a sound, basic education, were consolidated into one suit in September.¹⁵³ Because the lawsuits were not in process during the campaign, neither candidate made public comments directly in response to the issues raised.

¹⁵⁴ "NYSAPG Gubernatorial Candidate Scorecard 2014," last modified September 1, 2014, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/238348598/NYSAPG-Gubernatorial-Candidate-Scorecard-2014>

¹⁵⁵ Michael Goodwin, "Unions revolt on gov," *New York Post*, August 17, 2014.

¹⁵⁶ That was in question because Cuomo tried to keep her off the ballot by challenging her New York residency, including appealing a court decision that allowed her to be included. (Celeste Katz, "A United "No" AFL-CIO latest union to opt against backing gov," *New York Daily News*, August 19, 2014.)

¹⁵⁷ Jeremy Moule, "No AFL-CIO endorsement for Cuomo," *Rochester City Newspaper News Blog*, August 19, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.rochestercitynewspaper.com/NewsBlog/archives/2014/08/19/no-afl-cio-endorsement-for-cuomo>.

unlikely to endorse Cuomo, and the Public Employees Federation (PEF), with about 55,000 members, endorsed Teachout.¹⁵⁸

Building trades unions in New York wanted the AFL-CIO to endorse Cuomo as the union had done in the past, but in the end the AFL-CIO decided to abstain from endorsing because of pressure from public sector unions, most influentially the NYSUT and the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA). Some pressured the AFL-CIO not to endorse because of opposition to Cuomo policies like a cap on property tax increases.¹⁵⁹ However, it is most likely that pressure from the NYSUT originated from displeasure with Cuomo's education policies.

The NYSUT declined to endorse Cuomo a week before the AFL-CIO delegates met to vote on their endorsements. Because the NYSUT is an affiliate of the AFL-CIO, members of the teachers' union are sent as delegates to the AFL-CIO meetings. One member who refused to be named when interviewed by a newspaper reporter said that the Cuomo endorsement was blocked primarily by NYSUT and AFSCME members.¹⁶⁰ Another said that while the AFL-CIO would not rule out revisiting the question of whether to endorse Cuomo later in the campaign, perhaps after the primary, the decision certainly would not come up unless both the NYSUT and the CSEA agreed to consider it.¹⁶¹ This statement indicates the power that the NYSUT and the CSEA held within the AFL-CIO, and the strength of their desire to block an endorsement for Cuomo.

¹⁵⁸ Glenn Blain, "Unions 'Teach' Andy a lesson," *New York Daily News*, August 15, 2014.

¹⁵⁹ Steven Malanga, "Cross Country: The Emerging Political Divide Between Public and Private Unions," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 25, 2014.

¹⁶⁰ Jimmy Vielkind, "Cuomo endorsement not on AFL-CIO agenda," *Capital New York*, August 18, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/albany/2014/08/8550923/cuomo-endorsement-not-afl-cio-agenda>.

¹⁶¹ Celeste Katz, "New York State AFL-CIO holding off on Cuomo endorsement: Updated," *New York Daily News*, August 18, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/dailypolitics/new-york-state-afl-cio-holding-cuomo-endorsement-blog-entry-1.1907295>.

Conclusion

Education reform played a crucial but behind-the-scenes role in the New York gubernatorial primary. If Cuomo had had a better relationship with the teachers' unions, and had adopted education policies in his campaign platform that they supported, then his opponent would not have been able to generate momentum in her campaign. Cuomo's fight for the Working Families Party in May slowed down the beginning of his campaign, and Teachout generated more momentum for her campaign by appealing to parents and teachers throughout the state who were disillusioned by Cuomo's education policies.

In this case study, it is interesting to consider the relationship between the WFP, which initially pressured Teachout to run for governor, and the NYSUT. The WFP's decision to endorse Cuomo at the expense of damaging Teachout's campaign indicates a lack of consideration for the teachers' union's preferences. Although the WFP did win solid progressive policy promises from Cuomo, it is possible that they could have held out longer and requested education policy promises more in line with the teachers' union's education policy preferences. Perhaps the teachers' union and the WFP had not cultivated a relationship, and were instead acting as individual political units when they could have been stronger and more effective players in the field of New York politics by acting together. This could be an example of education reform policy being controversial enough to divide progressives and thereby weaken their cause – if the WFP perceived education policy as a black and white issue where Cuomo and the teachers' unions would stick to completely opposing positions, then there would have been no incentive to seek incremental movement from the governor in his re-election campaign.

After it was over...

Although my thesis is limited to examining teacher unions' endorsements in Democratic primaries, this case study offers an opportunity to see how that endorsement process may have affected the winner's positions on education policy after the campaign was over.

At the end of the primary campaign, Cuomo credited three groups of voters for Teachout's success at the polls: Anti-fracking voters, state workers who were unhappy with contracts during Cuomo's administration, and public teachers who oppose the teacher evaluation system.¹⁶² His recognition of these three issues as areas of significant concern for New York voters might have been translated into an understanding that his constituents wanted Cuomo to reconsider his policy agenda in these areas – or to revise his policymaking process to make it more inclusive at the beginning. Instead, after the primary election, Cuomo acknowledged that he could not please everyone, and demonstrated no inclination to pursue Teachout supporters for the general election.¹⁶³ Cuomo also called education a public monopoly, and vowed to overhaul the system. This earned him negative comments from WFP and NYSUT.¹⁶⁴ As of early 2015, Cuomo has continued to perpetuate his combative relationship with New York's teachers' unions, which suggests that he did not learn lessons from his election that would have led him to reconcile those tensions.

¹⁶² David Klepper, "NY primary exposes Cuomo's problems with the left," *Associated Press*, September 13, 2014.

¹⁶³ David Klepper, "NY primary exposes Cuomo's problems with the left."

¹⁶⁴ Joseph Spector, "Cuomo criticized for calling schools a 'public monopoly,'" October 29, 2014, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://blogs.democratandchronicle.com/voteup/2014/10/29/cuomo-criticized-for-calling-schools-a-public-monopoly/>.

Conclusion: Analysis/Implications

My case-study based qualitative examination of teachers' unions and their relationship with the Democratic Party leaves me with some conclusions and with many further questions. My case studies, centered on state-level electoral politics through the gubernatorial primaries in New York and Rhode Island, lead me to believe that teachers' unions are strong enough to have an influential outcome in a Democratic primary election, although they have greater power for blocking a disfavored candidate than for promoting a chosen candidate to electoral victory. The teachers' unions make their electoral decisions based on education policy, and it is unclear from my case studies whether this blocking power results in favorable education policy when their chosen candidate does not win. My case studies also indicate that state Democratic Parties stand to lose power when there is a clear difference between Democratic candidates on education policy. Multiple stances on education policy necessarily mean that at least one candidate will differ from the party's education platform, which means that the Party does not have decisive influence over its candidates. Additionally, having a tough primary campaign means that Democratic electoral allies, like teachers' unions, will expend resources during the primary that cannot be used in the general election against the Republican opponent.

I can extrapolate from my state-level case studies that the national Democratic Party also faces similar challenges of division and wasted electoral resources if Democratic candidates continue to have contrasting education policies and if some Democratic candidates persist in supporting education policies that the teachers' unions oppose.

In the Democratic primaries in Rhode Island and New York, teachers' unions succeeded in wielding their electoral power primarily as a blocking tool. In both races, teachers' unions

supported a candidate who faced insurmountably long odds of winning, and their political activism ended up helping the candidate they opposed.

In New York, the largest impact of the teachers' unions' electoral power was to block the AFL-CIO from endorsing Andrew Cuomo. That success, among a few others, took away from Cuomo's momentum during the primary campaign, and cost him the landslide victory that he sought to advance his political career. It did not, however, lead Cuomo to change his electoral strategy or seek out the votes of teachers' unions and their supporters in the general election. My research into the Cuomo-Teachout primary leads me to conclude that, in two important ways, teachers' unions both succeeded and failed. First, the combined state-level union, the NYSUT, succeeded in demonstrating its electoral influence to New York politicians – more specifically, New York Democrats. Future gubernatorial candidates will know that their campaign can be seriously impacted by the way that the NYSUT chooses to endorse or to influence other endorsing organizations, which will lead them to make political calculations early in the campaign as they write their education policy platform and consider how their candidacy will be received by the teachers' unions. Secondly, the union failed to sway education policy the way they wanted during this election cycle. The teachers' union's role in the election appears to have embittered Cuomo against them and reconfirmed his pursuit of education reform policies, as seen when he called the schools a “public monopoly” in October after the primary election. This leads me to conclude that from a short-term, outcome-oriented perspective, if teachers' unions wish to influence education policy, then they ought to stay on good terms with the candidate who is most likely to win – or at least strive to avoid antagonizing him or her. From a long-term perspective, the teachers' union ought to engage with the New York Democratic Party and convince the party to espouse teachers-union-friendly education policies.

In the three-person Rhode Island gubernatorial primary, teachers' unions took the risk of endorsing their favorite progressive candidate, Clay Pell, instead of choosing to back Angel Taveras, the progressive who was most likely to win against Gina Raimondo, the centrist Democrat. It appears that in this case, teachers' unions made a mistake in acting independently of their political allies – nearly all other labor unions endorsed Taveras – in pursuit of a more perfect candidate for education policy. This is an instance of using political power for blocking – preventing a candidate from winning instead of propelling a candidate to victory. Unfortunately, in this instance the candidate that they helped the most was the centrist Democrat. The lesson to be taken from this campaign is that teachers' unions ought to carefully consider the outcome that is most important to them: either sending a lesson to Democrats about their electoral power, or delivering into office an acceptable, if less-perfect candidate who would be grateful for teachers' union support. Dividing two progressive candidates could serve as a demonstration of political power for future candidates. In this case, the unions failed to force the eventual winner – Raimondo, the centrist – to spend much of her campaign focused on education policy, and so there is little indication that she will make education policy a priority of her gubernatorial administration. On the other hand, teachers' unions may be glad that Raimondo was never pressured into supporting an education reform policy that they would oppose.

The questions to take away from this case are the following: Do teachers' unions want to send a message to Democrats about their position on education policy, or do they want to put a Democrat in office who would be most sympathetic to their policy preferences? Furthermore, would it be more beneficial to teachers' unions to pressure Democratic candidates and parties to change, or to pressure other labor unions to change their practices and join with teachers' unions in their endorsement decisions?

Overall, these two cases lead me to believe that teachers' unions currently are influential in *opposing* candidates and specific education policy positions, but that they must persuade other segments of the labor movement to join them if they are to be successful in effecting proactive policy change through the electoral process. If the teachers' unions are able to successfully navigate into a position of positive influence, then they might be able to present their education policy preferences not as defensive positions, but rather as positive means of improving American public education.

There are several implications for the national Democratic Party that are related to the unity of the party and the financial value of teachers' unions' electoral endorsements. A partisan primary, at its most extreme, can either unify and energize the partisan base or divide and weaken the party. If Democrats fail to unify around major education planks in the party platform, then they risk divisive primaries that will hurt the party. This is true for the national party and each individual state party. If some Democratic candidates and elected officials continue to advance education reform policies without being inclusive or respectful of teachers' unions, then it seems inevitable that there will be tough primaries in the future, especially at the state level, where important big-picture education policy decisions are made.

The result of teachers' unions' strong cohesion at the national and state levels in their policy preferences, is that it would be close to impossible for state Democratic Parties to end up with disparate education policy platforms if they choose to pursue teachers' unions' support. Rather, if the Democratic Parties were to unite and choose to engage with teachers' unions create a supportive education policy platform, then by necessity, the state Democratic Parties will be in line with national Democratic Party's education platform, which will encourage more cohesiveness within the national Democratic Party, thereby strengthening the party.

When Democrats are divided and engage in combative primaries, one consequence is that a great deal of money is spent that cannot be used in the general election. If Democrats have extremely competitive primaries, then they will reduce their effectiveness in the general election when running against Republican candidates. This is true both because of depleting campaign contributions, and also because a divisive primary may discourage the base from turning out to vote in the general election. Within the context of the two-party system, it is not in the interest of Democrats to allow teachers' unions to spend their significant political funds during the primaries. Furthermore, Democrats must carefully consider the value of teachers' unions' funds in the current electoral climate. As election laws allow more and more money to be spent, it may be more crucial to remain closely allied to wealthy and powerful electoral actors such as teachers' unions. There is a possibility that the proliferation of political organizations like PACs could diminish the influence of teachers' unions, but that seems unlikely. Within the realm of education policy, there are no other existing political groups with comparable funding. Democrats for Education Reform might come close, but it lacks organizational capacity or a membership to influence campaigns quite the same way.

My thesis opened with the question of whether teachers' unions should attempt to influence education policy outcomes through elections, and I have tentative answers to the question – different answers for short-term and long-term effects. In the short term, teachers' unions should generally only pursue certain education policy outcomes through the electoral process if they can support a Democratic candidate that they can influence and push to victory. Otherwise, they may embitter the winner and drive that Democrat towards education reform policies that the unions do not support. If teachers' unions are more interested in long-term effect, then it makes sense to support a candidate who may not win, because the teachers' union can

demonstrate their commitment to certain education policies by blocking a more favored and pro-education reform candidate from winning an even higher number of votes. That strategy could have long-term effects by convincing the national and state Democratic Parties and individual Democratic candidates to more seriously consider teachers' unions and their education policy priorities when running for office.

Finally, the questions of this thesis were raised within the frame of the larger relationship between Democrats and the labor movement. From my examination of their historic relationship and the two case studies, it seems that both labor unions and Democrats have accepted the idea that interest groups dominate American politics, and that they should make political choices about specific policies in an isolated, case by case manner. Teachers' unions' autonomy from other labor unions in making their electoral decisions makes it more difficult for Democrats to interact and collaborate with the labor movement as a whole. And Democrats' perception of specific labor unions as being more committed to individual policy areas than to general labor policy makes it more difficult for labor to rely on Democrats and work with the Party to achieve significant initiatives. It is in the interest of both the labor movement and the Democratic Party to come to consensus about education policy priorities in a way that would promote cooperation and collaboration on a larger scale.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Acronyms

AFL: American Federation of Labor

AFL-CIO: American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations

APPR: Annual Professional Performance Review (in New York State)

CIO: Congress of Industrial Organizations

CSEA: Civil Service Employees Association

DLC: Democratic Leadership Council

EFCA: Employee Free Choice Act

NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement

NYSUT: New York State United Teachers

PAC: Political Action Committee

SEIU: Service Employees International Union

Appendix B:*Top Twenty-Five All-Time Donors in Federal Elections, 1989 – 2010*

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Total Contributions (dollars)</i>	<i>Percent of Contributions going to Democrats</i>
NEA plus AFT	59,354,731	95
AT&T	45,728,859	44
ActBlue	44,681,701	99
AFSCME	43,028,411	98
National Association of Realtors	37,629,299	48
Goldman Sachs	33,035,202	62
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	32,686,566	97
American Association for Justice	32,685,029	90
Laborers Union	29,834,300	92
Carpenters and Joiners Union	28,945,308	89
SEIU	28,895,482	95
Teamsters Union	28,877,009	93
Communications Workers of America	27,999,606	98
Citigroup	27,723,481	50
American Medical Association	26,865,020	39
United Auto Workers	26,510,252	98
Machinists and Aerospace Workers Union	26,151,277	98
National Auto Dealers Association	26,004,258	32
United Parcel Service	25,119,404	36
United Food and Commercial Workers Union	24,975,233	98
Altria Group	24,416,516	27
American Bankers Association	23,804,070	40
National Association of Home Builders	23,299,405	35
EMILY's List	22,801,244	99
National Beer Wholesalers Association	22,309,765	33

Source: Center for Responsive Politics at www.opensecrets.org/orgs/list.php?order=A.